SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July–August 2022
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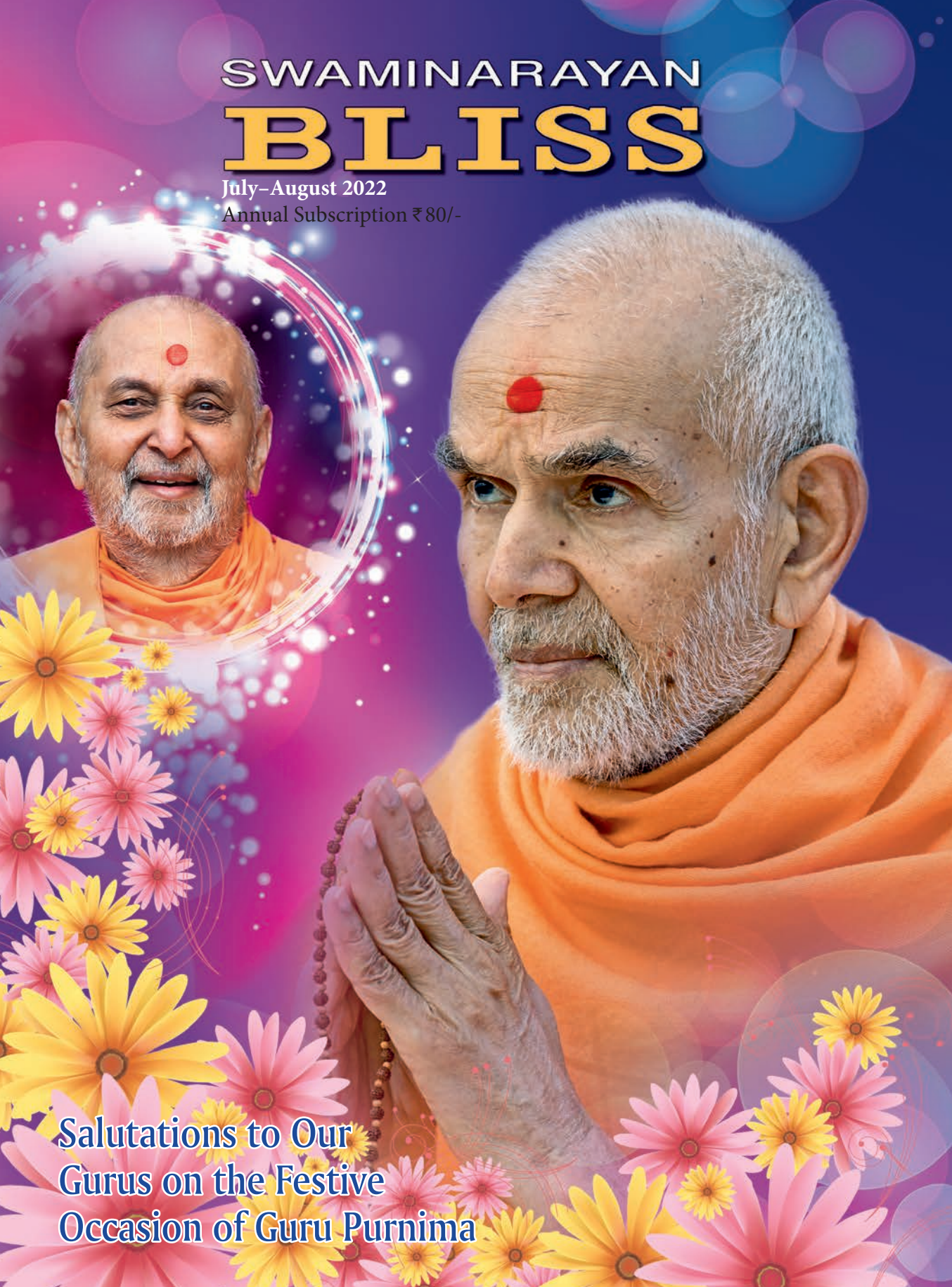


Salutations to Our Gurus on the Festive Occasion of Guru Purnima

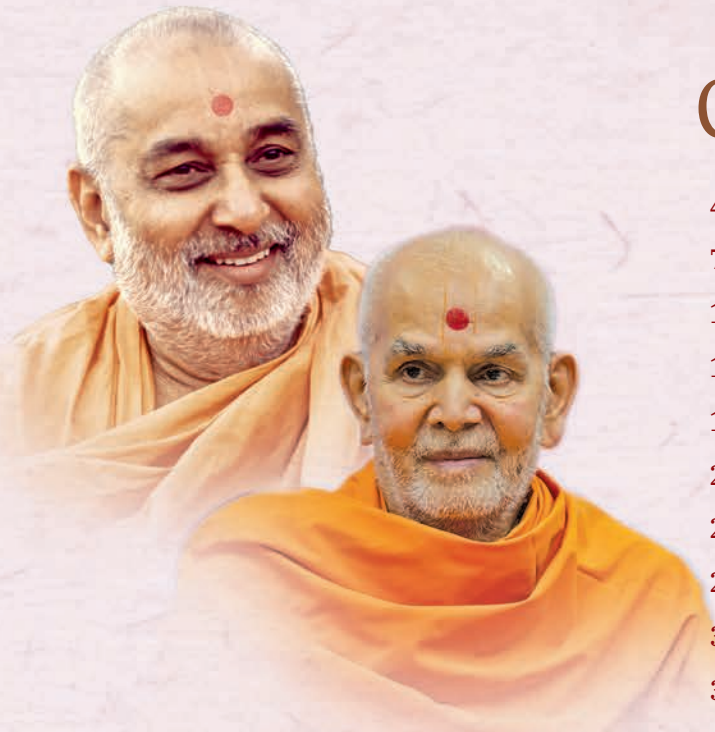
INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY, 21 June 2022

BAPS centres worldwide celebrated the International Yoga Day with special yoga and health-related programmes. One such event was held at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi (above).

(*Inset*): In Ahmedabad, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj performs pranayam to celebrate the day.

BAPS RESEARCH INSTITUTES INAUGURATIONS & SEMINARS ON PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

1. Inauguration of the BAPS Research Institute for UK & Europe at BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, London (29 May 2022). Other BAPS Research Institute branches were inaugurated in USA and Canada in June 2022.
2. Seminar on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's contributions to agriculture at Bansilal Amritlal Krushi Mahavidyalaya, Anand Krushi University, Anand, on 10 May 2022. It was one of an ongoing series of seminars being held at numerous universities highlighting the multi-faceted works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July–August 2022, Vol. 45, No. 4

Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

In April 1978, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the Gunatit guru *parampara*. It also seeks to inspire the universal values and traditions of Hinduism to pursue a happy and peaceful life by serving God and humankind.

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CONTENTS

4 Return to Gadhada
7 The Guru and the Seeker
11 Epic Efforts for De-addiction (Part 2)
16 Behind the Sacred Relic
18 Letters to Pramukh Swami Maharaj
22 Guru Bhakti
25 The Bridge to God
26 Result-oriented Life and Stress
30 Climbing the J Curve
33 Nitya Puja
35 Inspirations
37 Mahant Swami Maharaj's Vicharan
44 Bhagatji Maharaj Smruti Mandir
53 Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan
59 BAPS Mandirs Celebrate International Yoga Day
60 BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute Inaugurations, UK & Europe, USA, Canada
62 Seminars on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Contributions to Society
64 BAPS Invited to the European Union-Bahrain Conference on 'Freedom of Religion and Belief'
65 HRH Crown Prince & PM of Bahrain Receives BAPS Delegation
66 First Historic Interfaith Conference
68 Special Prayer Assembly for His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan
69 BAPS News

RETURN TO GADHADA

After Dada Khachar's marriage in Bhatvadar, Shri Hari was in a hurry to return to Gadhada...

HE IS PARABRAHMA PURUSHOTTAM NARAYAN

In Hindorda, lived an old disciple of Atmanand Swami. One night, Atmanand Swami appeared to him in a dream and said, "Tomorrow morning, one who will steer a chariot into Hindorda is Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan. Since you have served me I am informing you that he is God. Thus, you bow at his feet and take refuge in him." The disciple was happy with the divine darshan of his guru. The next morning, he went to the outskirts of his village and saw Shri Hari steering a chariot. The disciple bowed to him and took his refuge and became his disciple.

From Hindorda, Shri Hari travelled to Rajula. Here, Nagdan Soni had collected food materials to be cooked for lunch for Shri Hari and his entourage. Nagdan pressed Shri Hari to have lunch, but Maharaj said, "You load all the food materials onto our oxen carts. We cannot stay now, but we will cook our food once we have covered some distance." Once everything was loaded, Shri Hari told the driver of his chariot to steer ahead. Since Maharaj's chariot was moving swiftly the oxen carts in his procession trailed way behind. Soon, Shri Hari arrived at the village of Vavare and settled down in a shrine of Shiv. After some time, the oxen carts had not arrived so Maharaj climbed up the Shiv shrine and saw that the carts were far away. Once they had all arrived, Shri Hari instructed his sadhus to prepare a meal from the food materials provided by Nagdan. Thereafter, Shri Hari and the members of the marriage procession took lunch. Early next morning, Shri Hari travelled to the villages of Ghanla, Bhamar, Meryane and Goradke, where he halted at the farm of Prajapati, a devotee. Punamati, a female devotee, had a meal prepared by Brahmins for Shri Hari and his entire group. When Shri Hari sat down to eat, Muktanand Swami, Dada Khachar and others came to do darshan. After Shri Hari had finished eating, Punamati came and donated five *koris*[1] at Maharaj's feet.

Shri Hari smiled, looked at Muktanand Swami, who was seating far away, and said, "This old woman is being dishonest and devious with me. Once, when her son was suffering from smallpox she had pledged to donate seven *koris* after her son's recovery. Today, she has considered two *koris* for the meal she offered and made a donation of five *koris*." The old woman was astonished and felt uneasy at Shri Hari's all-knowing power's, because she had never revealed her pledge to anyone. Hurriedly, she brought two *koris* and placed them at Maharaj's feet and fulfilled her pledge.

OFFER CASH DONATIONS INSTEAD OF A MEAL

Shri Hari departed from Goradke and travelled to the villages of Gadhakde and Pithavadi. Here, he stayed at Bhaga and Mula's house. The local devotees insisted upon Shri Hari and his group to stay for five days. On seeing their resolve, Maharaj called an astrologer and asked him the auspicious day for him and his procession to depart. The astrologer took out his almanac and said, "Maharaj, you can either leave on the day after or five days later. Other than that there is no other auspicious day to depart."

1. An old silver currency coin, having a value of one-third of a rupee.

Surprabha Devi pressed, "Maharaj, we cannot stay for more days. Let's return to Gadhpur at the earliest." Subsequently, Shri Hari proposed to the local devotees, "If you want to offer us a meal, donate *koris* according to your means. If you donate more than your means, I will not accept them." The devotees quickly collected 4,000 *koris* from the devotees and offered them to Maharaj. Shri Hari accepted only 2,000 *koris* and departed early next morning.

Shri Hari and his entourage proceeded to the villages of Savar, Liliya, Akalu and Ansodar. Here, Rudo Golviyo, a great devotee, had a feast prepared by Brahmins for the whole group. He also offered gur to eat for the oxen and donated a cartload of gur to take along with them. Thereafter, the procession advanced to Ambardi via Bhurakhiya. Shri Hari camped under a banyan tree on the village outskirt. The local devotees came to serve and offer a meal to the whole group. They also gave eleven carts containing sugarcane to Maharaj. Shri Hari was extremely pleased with their generosity and devotional sentiments.

DADA KHACHAR RETURNS HOME

Shri Hari and the marriage procession finally returned to Gadhpur early next morning. All the family members and others in the house were overjoyed and welcomed Dada Khachar and his new wife. Shri Hari was also enthused because he was happy in the joy of his devotees. He did darshan of the *murti* of Vasudev Narayan and went to his room – Akshar Ordi.

* * *

After arriving in Gadhpur, Shri Hari instructed his sadhus to vacate the house they were staying in and reside in the newly constructed Nagmala mansion. Shri Hari resided in the south-facing house where his sadhus once lived. Whenever his sadhus came to Gadhpur they stayed at the house of a Shrimali Brahmin. Shri Hari taught yoga postures to his sadhus and sometimes Gopalanand Swami taught them. Nityanand Swami and others learnt several yoga postures from Shriji Maharaj. The sadhus' principal aim was to abide by Shri Hari's wish and please him.

MAHARAJ SEES THE MURTI OF VASUDEV IN SHVETDWIP

The next day, Shri Hari spoke to his sadhus, "Today, all of you must eat generously and bless the newly married Dada Khachar with prosperity." Then, Maharaj lavishly served laddus to his sadhus for lunch. Shortly after, Adharanand Swami and Dharmatmanand Swami arrived from Surat. They had brought a *murti* painted by the Nawab's artist. The *murti* was of Shri Vasudev Bhagwan in an austere pose, with two hands raised upwards. Shri Hari was pleased to see the *murti* and remarked, "There is no difference between the form of Shri Vasudev performing austerities in Shvetdwip and this painted *murti*. This *murti* matches the description found in the shastras." Then, Shri Hari gave three laddus each to both the sadhus. Thereafter, Maharaj retired to take his afternoon rest in his new house.

In the evening, Shri Hari sat on a bed in the east-facing direction and asked for the painted *murti* of Shri Vasudev to be brought to him. Maharaj showed the *murti* to all his sadhus, who were extremely pleased with the painting. Thereafter, Adharanand Swami gave news about Surat, "The local administrator belongs to the Vaishnav denomination, but he is steeped in addictions and hates our devotees. He does not trouble any one who has become a new *satsangi* (devotee) belonging to a large community. However, he troubles new *satsangis* belonging to a small group and excommunicates them from their community." Shri Hari replied, "Whoever opposes and is hostile towards my *satsangis* will bear the consequences. Soon, the administrator will reap the fruits of his bad acts."[2]

FULDOL FESTIVAL IN SHRINAGAR (1825 CE, A.S. 1881)

After Shri Hari consecrated the *murtis* of

2. Soon enough, the administrator was jailed for his fault in the local government.

Nar-Narayan in Shrinagar (also Shripur and Ahmedabad) in 1822 CE, no major festival had been celebrated. So, the devotees of Shrinagar wrote a letter praying to Shri Hari to come and celebrate the Fuldol festival. Shri Hari immediately called Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Shuk Muni and others and said, "This time, I wish to celebrate the Fuldol festival in Ahmedabad, therefore send letters of invitation to all the devotees. Also, write a letter to the devotees of Shrinagar confirming that we will celebrate the festival there." Shuk Muni did as Maharaj bidded.

RIVER VASAR BECOMES A PILGRIM PLACE

In February 1825, Shri Hari left Gadhpur with his sadhus, *parshads* and devotees to go to Shripur. Maharaj passed through the outskirts of Sarangpur, Sundariyana and Kanthariya and came to the River Vasar. Here, Shri Hari swam, played and told his sadhus to sing bhajans, and showered his divine joy on all. The River Vasar became holy and blessed as a pilgrim place.[3] Thereafter, everyone ate snacks and proceeded to the villages of Shiyani, Tavi, Devaliya, Daduka, Machhiyav and Sanand. Here, Shri Hari stayed the night and travelled the next morning to Ahmedabad. The devotees of Shrinagar came to know that Shri Hari and his entourage had arrived on the outskirts.

DEVOTEES OF SHRINAGAR WELCOME SHRI HARI

Shri Hari and his group bathed in the River Sabarmati and commenced their morning puja rituals. At that time, the devotees of Shrinagar arrived to welcome them. The leading devotees garlanded Shri Hari and said, "Maharaj, we have brought decorated oxen carts and palanquins to take you and your entourage to Ahmedabad." Shri Hari thus instructed the senior *sadgurus* and some devotees to travel in the oxen carts and palanquins. On the opposite bank, many devotees were waiting with musical instruments to welcome Maharaj and his entire group. The devotees of Shrinagar had cleaned and sprinkled water on the main roads of the city. The earthy fragrance made the occasion all the more pleasing. The crossroads were decorated with banana trunks and festoons of mango leaves. The devotees of Shrinagar were ecstatic because Shri Hari, his sadhus and devotees had arrived to celebrate the Fuldol festival. As the procession proceeded, the people of Shrinagar came out into their galleries, on terraces and streets to welcome and cheer Shri Hari.

GRAND WELCOME

A grand welcome was given to Shri Hari as he entered Shrinagar through one of its main gates. Along the way, several prominent well-wishers offered garlands to Shri Hari and thousands showered flower petals on him and his procession. People hailed the victory calls of "Swaminarayan Bhagwan *ni jai*". Finally, the procession entered into the precincts of the Nar-Narayan Mandir in Nava Vas. The entire mandir grounds were packed with devotees from near and far-off places. First, Maharaj did darshan of the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev in the central shrine of the mandir. At that time, the devotees hailed, "Nar-Narayan *ni jai.*" Thereafter, Shri Hari sat on a platform under the shade of a neem tree in the mandir grounds. The auspicious sounds of instruments percolated through the mandir grounds to create a divine ambience. Thousands of devotees and well-wishers had gathered in the mandir grounds to do Maharaj's darshan. Some even honoured Maharaj with garlands. ◆

(*Contd. in next issue*)

Translated from the Gujarati text of *Bhagwan Swaminarayan* authored by Shri H.T. Dave

3. Today, this place is known as Narayan Dhara in the satsang. Every year, on Bhadarva *vad* 15 (September), Swaminarayan sadhus and devotees come here to bathe and hear discourses. To preserve the sacredness of Shriji Maharaj's visit here, Shukratmanand Swami installed a *murti* of Hanumanji in a shrine.
-*Ahmedabad ma Bhagwan Swaminarayan*, Page 319 (Translation of Gujarati reference)

Bhagwan Veda Vyas narrates the Shrimad Bhagavat to Shukhdevji

The Guru and the Seeker

The Sanskrit word 'guru' has been in use throughout India for many millennia, since the Vedic era. Translated, it means 'teacher', but actually represents a meaning beyond the general translation. 'Gu' means 'ignorance' and 'ru' means 'dispeller'. The guru, thus, is one who dispels ignorance – of all types – and gives knowledge. The original sense in which the title 'guru' was used referred to the spiritually accomplished seers of Vedic times who guided the young students living and learning in their ashrams, known as *gurukuls*. The guru tutored his young *shishyas* (students) in a variety of spiritual and secular disciplines. In this way the guru fulfilled many roles: as a teacher, counsellor, father-figure, and even as a bridge to the Divine. The guru was principally all this, and more. In this sense, he is an entity which has no exact equivalent in Western culture.

Traditionally, the guru is primarily regarded as a personal spiritual mentor. He possesses not only theoretical knowledge but the experience of the spiritual heights to which he leads his *shishyas*. The sages of the Vedic and Upanishadic eras passed on this profound spiritual wisdom to their disciples. And the disciples, in turn, served their guru and, later, they too imparted this knowledge to their students.

In this way, the guru-*shishya* tradition of Hinduism has been nurtured from Vedic times right up to the present day.

THE NEED FOR A GURU

A question naturally arises: Why not directly serve God. Why is the guru required as an intermediary?

The story of Namdev provides the answer. Once, Sant Jnaneshwar, Namdev and other devotees had gathered at the home of Gora the potter. Sant Jnaneshwar, their leader, said to Gora, "Test the pots gathered here to see whether or not they are well-baked. So, Gora took a stick and began tapping it on the heads of everyone present. No one said a word, except Namdev who protested. Hence, he was declared as the only unbaked pot. This insult offended Namdev and so he went for comfort to Lord Vitthala. But the Lord sided with Gora, saying, "One who does not surrender to a *sadguru* is an unbaked pot. When Namdev questioned the need for a guru, the Lord replied, that he too, in his avatars as Ram and Krishna had accepted gurus for guidance. Then, the Lord instructed Namdev to seek the refuge of the enlightened Visoba in the mandir of Mallikarjuna and serve him as his guru. Thus, by serving Visoba, Namdev became properly baked and attained enlightenment.

The following incident from the Swaminarayan Sampradaya also reinforces this point. Girdharbhai, nephew of Kothari Gordhanbhai of Vartal, was a genuine spiritual seeker. He searched throughout the Satsang to find a Satpurush, a true guru, as described by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. However, none could quench his spiritual thirst. Eventually, he prayed before the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in Vartal, which Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself had consecrated. After one month, Bhagwan Swaminarayan appeared before him and directed, "I remain manifest in the Satsang through Pragji Bhakta. Seek his company and I shall dwell forever in your heart."

Despite this clear instruction, Girdharbhai thought that since Pragji Bhakta was a tailor by profession this was not possible. Again he prayed to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Bhagwan Swaminarayan again gave him darshan and repeated his guidance. So, Girdharbhai went to Pragji Bhakta and from the very first meeting he was convinced and accepted Pragji Bhakta as his guru. Under Pragji Bhakta's guidance, Girdharbhai became a sadhu and also attained the enlightened state.

Namdev

Pragji Bhakta

So, to attain spiritual enlightenment, one must surrender to a guru who is similarly enlightened.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SEEKER

First, let us discuss some of the characteristics of a worthy *shishya*. A *shishya* seeking enlightenment surrenders unconditionally to the guru, submitting to his will without question. This is possible only when the seeker understands the true glory of the guru.

The guru may sometimes respond by subjecting the seeker to harsh, stern, unfair, prejudiced or even physically harmful tasks. This is done not to harass or frighten him but to test his resolve and strengthen him spiritually. It is done with the aim of elevating him spiritually and inspiring him on the path of liberation. Those who follow the guru's commands and tolerate such hardships earn the guru's blessings and experience the bliss of God.

The more distinguished seekers are able to intuitively understand the guru's wish. For example, Yamunacharya was a respected elderly guru of the Srivaishnava Sampradaya. He learnt of Ramanujacharya's outstanding qualities and regarded him as a suitable successor. They had never met, so Yamunacharya sent a disciple to call Ramanujacharya. However, by the time they returned, Yamunacharya had passed away and his body was about to be cremated. Ramanujacharya was disappointed that he was unable to meet Yamunacharya, but accepted him as his guru and felt comfort in at least having had darshan of his physical form. Before the cremation, he

Ramanujacharya

Ramakrishna Paramhansa

Swami Vivekanand

noticed that three fingers of Yamunacharya's right hand were bent into a fist. Other disciples told Ramanujacharya that the guru had three unfulfilled wishes: (1) to write a commentary on Vyasji's Brahmasutras, (2) to promote the glory of Vyasji, Parashar and Nammalwar and (3) to spread the Srivaishnava philosophy. Ramanujacharya resolved to fulfil these three wishes. As soon as Ramanujacharya had made this pledge, the three fingers straightened. This demonstrated the inner bond between guru and disciple. Ramanujacharya later fulfilled all three wishes.

In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, also, such intuitive understanding was frequently seen between Gunatitanand Swami (guru) and Bhagatji Maharaj (disciple). This is clearly demonstrated when Bhagatji Maharaj watered the mango trees in the orchard of Sankhdavadar and removed the dead dog to re-start the construction work of the haveli in Junagadh.

A dedicated disciple is one who is so united with the guru that he gives up his own resolves and accepts whatever the guru commands. Yogiji Maharaj often said, "I have always acted according to the wishes of Shastriji Maharaj, but not according to the calling of my own mind. So, Shastriji Maharaj has become extremely pleased. And today he gives darshan and I experience bliss."

QUALITIES OF A GURU

Regarding the role of a guru, Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa said, "He [the guru] brings man and God together, even as a matchmaker brings together the lover and the beloved."

This was experienced by Swami Vivekanand (1863–1902), when, as Narendra, he first met Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836–1886) in November 1881. Overwhelmed by doubts about the existence of God, Narendra met Shri Ramakrishna at the Kali Temple in Dakshineshwar. Immediately, the bold Narendra asked a question to which he had never previously received a satisfactory answer, "Sir, have you seen God?" Without hesitation, Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes, I have. I see him as clearly as I see you, only in a more intense way." This emphatic declaration convinced Narendra, who accepted Sri Ramakrishna as his guru. Expressing this conviction, Swami Vivekanand stated, "The guru must be worshipped as God, he is nothing less than that. As you look at him, gradually the guru melts away, and what is left? The guru's picture gives way to God Himself. The guru is the bright mask which God wears in order to come to us. As we look steadily on, gradually the mask falls off and God is revealed."

Qualifying the eligibility of a guru, Swami Shivanand (1887–1963) explains, "Mere study of books cannot make one a guru. One who has studied the Vedas and who has direct knowledge of the *atman* through *anubhava* (experience) can alone be enrolled as a guru."

Gunatitanand Swami has also described three yardsticks by which to measure the calibre of a guru, "Before accepting him, check the guru's purity in three ways: first, check his own behaviour; second, check the capability of the one he has served (i.e. his guru); and third, know those who have attained (knowledge) through his company (i.e. his disciples)."

Another revered Hindu sadhu, Swami Muktanand (1908–1982) describes the universal comfort provided by the guru, "On the one hand, he (the guru) is adept in spiritual matters and,

on the other, he is exceedingly shrewd in his worldly dealings. Those aspirants who live under the protection of such a master pass through acute crises with ease and meet the most unfavourable circumstances fearlessly."

For the guru, exterior circumstances do not control his life, since his wisdom, strength and serenity are derived from within – due to communion with God.

The interplay between guru and *shishya* is well illustrated by the Gunatit guru *parampara* established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Each guru serves as disciple to his guru and is also mentor to his successor and countless other devotees.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami and the guru *parampara*

The tradition was set by Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself, who first served guru Ramanand Swami and then, as founder of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, led people to experience the bliss of God. He himself was revered as God and so, Gunatitanand Swami, the first guru, served him as both God and guru. Gunatitanand Swami renounced home at the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, performed austerities and physical service, and served in the demanding post as Mahant of the Junagadh mandir built by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Under Gunatitanand Swami's guidance, Bhagatji Maharaj experienced the highest state of God-realization. It is often said that Bhagatji Maharaj unquestioningly obeyed every command of Gunatitanand Swami, without concern for his own self or social status. Bhagatji Maharaj, for example, went to call Mt. Girnar, even though he was ridiculed by many claiming that he lacked discretion. Bhagatji Maharaj's reply, "I have obeyed the command. Now it is up to Girnar whether he comes or not," reveals the absolute subservience which had earned him Gunatitanand Swami's inner blessings.

Bhagatji Maharaj, in turn, nurtured Shastriji Maharaj, who boldly proclaimed the true understanding of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy despite much opposition and hardships.

Shastriji Maharaj, as guru, formally established the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS). He guided Yogiji Maharaj, who served with immense vigour to help in the construction of the initial BAPS mandirs and other foundational activities.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth guru of BAPS, had served both Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. As a newly initiated young sadhu, he served under Shastriji Maharaj, engaging in arduous physical services which were the priority at the time. Also, initially under the guidance of Shastriji Maharaj, he expertly and efficiently shouldered the administrative responsibilities of the Sanstha. Then, under the guidance of Yogiji Maharaj, he continued to manage the Sanstha's administration and also significantly contributed to the rapidly growing Satsang activities.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had presided over a period of phenomenal expansion of the Sanstha: the number of devotees, sadhus, mandirs, Satsang Centres worldwide, as well as, the wide range of spiritual, cultural, social, educational,

(*Cont. on p. 58*)

EPIC EFFORTS FOR DE-ADDICTION

(Part 2)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's campaign for de-addiction was unremitting and epic. An addiction-free life is the foundation of a happy and progressive society. Swamishri tirelessly endeavoured to free people from addictions and instil peace in society. The following article explores the various aspects and ways in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj redeemed many people from the shackles of addictions.

The leaders of Mahuva village invited Swamishri to come and inaugurate the electrification of the nearby Taredi village. Swamishri went there and inaugurated the electricity supply station, which was located near the Bhensla Hanumanji Mandir. Thereafter, a de-addiction programme was organized. Swamishri told the pujari of the mandir that as a priest he should not serve marijuana or opium to anyone.

The pujari said, "What can I do if other sannyasis ask for it?" Swamishri replied emphatically, "If a sannyasi comes and asks for diamonds, will you give them to him when you don't have them? Similarly, tell them that you don't consume and keep drugs and then lovingly serve them *rotlo* to eat. Does Hanuman Dada take drugs? Did Ram ever ask for drugs? Still, people come to have darshan of them in mandirs. If you quit, people will come for your darshan. In addition, preach about offering devotion to God."

Swamishri's words inspired the priest to quit smoking marijuana.

Once, a bridegroom went to Swamishri for blessings and then started inspecting his pocket to offer a donation. Swamishri, quick to observe his dark lips and stained teeth, said, "Never mind about that, I want you to take a pledge to give up your addiction." The groom agreed and quit his addiction to bidis and of chewing tobacco.

Swamishri's Herculean efforts in morally and socially transforming the tribals of Selvas and Panchmahal regions are noteworthy. Formerly,

almost every home used to indulge in drinking and eating meat. The tribals spent all their financial aid from the government in drinking and other addictions. After quitting their addictions, they became financially sound and built sturdy homes and provided their children with a good education.

In 1987, a 25-year old youth from Ahmedabad met Swamishri in Mumbai. He was addicted to heroin and other drugs. Swamishri endeavoured for two years to redeem him. After two years, the youth went to Sarangpur. He had quit heroin, but had started taking opium and Mandrax tablets. In 1989, Swamishri sat with him in Ahmedabad for half an hour, but he relapsed in his drug addiction. In 1990, when he met Swamishri in Sarangpur, Swamishri made arrangements for him to stay in the mandir and eventually enabled him to discard opium.

For the first four days, the youth's physical and emotional conditions were miserable. He wouldn't eat, banged his legs desperately on the ground, and tossed restlessly and sleeplessly in bed at night. For four days, Swamishri remained firm and gave him much assurance and strength. Thereafter, the youth's mind became strong. Due to Swamishri's blessings, he started liking food and regained his sleep at night. Still, he would occasionally smoke a few bidis secretly and then confess it to Swamishri, "I smoke three. Now, I'll smoke two." Swamishri said, "Where is the need for even two! Quit them altogether. If you experience a craving, take a clove from the kitchen and put it in your mouth and suck it slowly." Then, Swamishri took him to the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj and said, "Bow down here and pray. Now, no more bidis from today. Take this rose and whenever you feel like smoking a bidi, pluck and eat one rose petal."

And indeed, the youth became addiction-free. Swamishri continuously took care of him for three years and reinstated him on the right path.

This was one of the many stories of Swamishri's unflagging efforts, infinite compassion and unconditional love.

A person once told Swamishri, "Swami, you are so persistent in making me quit cigarettes, but I won't be able to give them up. The reason being that I started smoking before I got married. If you say so, I will give up my wife, but I can't quit cigarettes." One would think that what more could one say to such a person? Still, whenever Swamishri met him, he would talk to him about quitting cigarettes. Finally, Swamishri inspired him to reduce from smoking four packets to two, and eventually to smoke five cigarettes a day. Then, after one week, Swamishri made him quit cigarettes altogether. Today, that person appreciates Swamishri for helping him quit cigarettes, which subsequently improved his health and saved him money. Swamishri thus helped him benefit in three ways: physically, financially and spiritually.

Sometimes, Swamishri's effort in de-addicting someone failed to penetrate the person's mind and heart. In the village of Vesma, in south Gujarat, a 75-year-old man was addicted to bidis. His sons requested Swamishri to help their father give up smoking. Swamishri started explaining to him, but the old man did not relent one bit. When Swamishri persisted further, the man said, "Bapji! Please rest a little, because you must be tired." Swamishri broke out laughing at his concern. Swamishri's talk didn't touch him but it left an impression on his mind. The following year, a group of Swamishri's sadhus went there for *vicharan*. The sadhus gave a heartfelt talk on

Swamishri's glory and to everyone's surprise the old man quit his addiction. Swamishri's divine words and blessings had their desired effect on the old man.

In Sarangpur, Swamishri was once meeting some devotees after completing his daily morning routine. A devotee came and Swamishri enquired, "Do you have an addiction?"

He replied, "Yes, I smoke bidis, and I need to. I can't remain without them."

"Quit smoking now," Swamishri urged.

"No. If I give it up, my soul will get hurt. I don't want to hurt my soul."

"The addiction will lead you astray," Swamishri stated.

"Oh! Not at all."

"Even if you are a devotee, it will," Swamishri underscored.

"It might take others astray, but not me!"

"Your mind has surrendered and become weak. That's why you are talking in this manner," Swamishri diagnosed.

"I have been smoking since I was ten. Now, I am sixty-two. I smoked in the brief halts I took while steering my pair of oxen to pull water buckets from the well."

"Do you still steer your oxen?"

"No, not anymore. But I have to keep the bidis with me, because when the labourers come what will I give them? When I give them bidis they start working."

"You will die because of your addiction," Swamishri spoke solemnly.

"Let me die in that way. One has to die one day!"

"Since you smoke two packets every day, why not reduce it to five to six bidis daily?"

"That sounds okay. I will quit gradually."

In spite of the devotee's chronic habit, Swamishri tried his best to unhinge him from his addiction. Swamishri's inexhaustible patience and perseverance are apparent from this incident.

In USA, an American, Ricky Prejacti, who regularly attended a yoga centre, came for Swamishri's darshan. He sat in *vajrasan*. After enquiring from him, it seemed that he had a fair knowledge of the Upanishads. However, he drank liquor, ate meat and smoked two to three times a week.

Swamishri told him to quit them all. He asked, "I can't quit. With what perspective should I give them up?" Swamishri replied, "Where is the need for having a perspective? It is poison. Will you take poison? See, we don't smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, still we remain blissful."

He responded feebly, "I will try."

"Don't say try, just quit them. Let me know if there are any benefits of drinking and smoking," Swamishri argued. Ricky remained quiet and started sweating profusely.

Swamishri said, "You have learnt spiritual knowledge and are also studying the Upanishads, yet how odd it is that you drink and smoke."

He said with resignation, "I am bound to my base nature (*swabhavs*)."

Swamishri explained, "Because you are under the influence of addictions, you are unable to quit your *swabhavs*. If you do what I say, you will be able to control your nature. If you continue drinking and smoking, you will not be able to progress on the spiritual path. You meditate on God, but your thoughts about addictions disturb your meditation. Addictions are like shackles. Even a slight thought about it will not allow you to progress spiritually. This disturbance will hinder you in everything you do. So, quit your addictions and bad habits."

Ricky remained quiet again. He cast his eyes downwards and started wiping his sweat. Swamishri enquired, "What are you thinking? At least say something."

He said, "What can I tell you Swamiji! I came here to beg for just a drop of your compassion, whereas you are totally submerging me in an ocean."

Swamishri smiled and said, "Just imagine,

when you give up addictions what will happen to you? What do you think?"

He answered, "If I quit smoking and drinking, I will be gripped by fear, tension, pain and worry."

Swamishri commented, "You are already gripped by them. You are in fear. You worry even at the mere thought of quitting! You should think that nothing will happen to you if you quit."

Ricky said, "If I am not able to follow the pledge, I would incur sin upon myself."

Swamishri emphasized, "You are already sinning by taking addictions. Though you call yourself spiritual, but because of your addictions to drinking and smoking you are committing sins."

He remained silent. Finally, Swamishri asked, "Do you like it when others in the world take drugs?

"No."

Swamishri said, "Your next step will be indulging in drugs. Will you like that?"

"No."

"Then why not give up your bad habits now!"

For the first time in his life, he had found someone like Swamishri who was lovingly and personally explaining to him. Finally, he gave a promise to make an honest attempt, offered *panchang* pranam and asked for Swamishri's blessings. Swamishri's eyes were full of compassion while blessing him and said, "Write a letter to me when you quit."

Countless were drenched in the river of Swamishri's compassion. Swamishri drastically transformed the life of Mahendrabhai of Surat, who used to spend almost two thousand rupees in drinking and other addictions every month. After a year, Mahendrabhai's father narrated to Swamishri the story of his son's life prior to his transformation, "I am surprised to see my son's change. In 38 years, he had never woken up before 10 a.m., whereas now he daily wakes up at 4.30 a.m., does puja and takes all his friends early in the morning to the mandir. After doing darshan, he sweeps the entire mandir grounds. Formerly, he was so fond of eating different dishes on all seven days that he would get irate if they were not served to him. But now, he has completely changed and has stopped eating at hotels. Indeed, my family and I are very happy. Only God has transformed him. It was not a small deal that he stopped drinking and started attending satsang."

Due to Swamishri's inspiration, devotees also inspired others to quit addictions. Swamishri had inculcated the lessons of pure living in the lives of devotees such that their conduct ignited change in others.

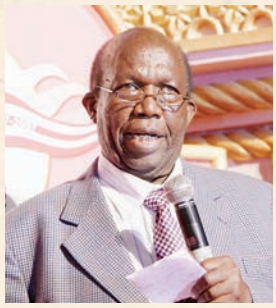
Most of the people who quit addictions remained firm in their pledges because of Swamishri's spiritual influence and affectionate persona.

In Bhoj village, many Harijans quit drinking and other addictions due to the inspiration of Swamishri and his sadhus. Usually, on the day of Holi, the Harijans celebrated Holi in another village. Every year, according to tradition, they served alcohol to each other. However, the Harijans of Bhoj, after giving up their addictions, declared to their brothers, "We have become disciples of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, hence we will neither serve nor drink alcohol." Drawing inspiration from them, the Harijans of other villages also pledged not to drink alcohol.

In 1985, on the occasion of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami's Bicentenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad, a de-addiction camp was organized at the Swaminarayan Nagar for 59 days. Thousands of people pledged to give up addictions. Joseph Maturia, a former Kenyan Minister for Lands and Settlement, also took a vow of not drinking beer in the main celebration assembly before thousands of people. Swamishri said, "Maturia Saheb has given up drinking. Our celebration has served its noble purpose. Now, he will take this message of de-addiction to Kenya."

Later, in 1988, during Swamishri's visit to Kenya, Mr Maturiya thanked Swamishri and said, "Swamiji, you have entered my heart since you gave me the message of leading an

addiction-free life. All my thoughts pertaining to addictions have been extinguished. Not only that, whoever I talk to about giving up addictions, he or she wishes to improve his or her life and so quits addictions. Here, in Kenya, we have an 86-year-old retired minister. He is the oldest retired politician in the world, having served the longest tenure in politics. He used to smoke heavily for 70 years. When I explained to him to quit, he gave it up."


Joseph Maturia

When Mr Maturia was asked what thought he kept in mind while talking to people to quit addictions. He replied, "First, I remember your festival celebrated in India in 1985. Then, I remember Pramukh Swami, and lastly I wish for the good of their souls, and so they are inspired to give up their addictions. This happens due to Swamishri's inspiration. I have to attend grand parties, but I observe my pledge resolutely. The thought of drinking alcohol doesn't arise in me; not even when I am in the State House parliament."

Many people become addicted to TV and it makes even a hardworking person lazy. Today, TV is one of the causes for students to go morally astray. Swamishri made great efforts and took immense care that youths did not become lethargic due to TV.

Whenever Swamishri addressed the youths in a satsang assembly, he emphasized on the deleterious effects of TV. Once, the youths in Ahmedabad performed a drama called 'Sugar-Coated Poison'. It highlighted the vices of TV. Then, Swamishri blessed the satsang assembly, "People know that TV is like poison, yet they watch it because it tastes sweet; but it ruins lives. How many have become virtuous after watching TV? On the contrary, whatever virtues one has are destroyed. Once you start watching TV, there will be no limits. So, don't ever install it at home. It will be difficult to control your children from going to a neighbour's or friend's house to watch it. If you have to buy and install one at home, use it with restraint. Limit it to watching the news and wholesome programmes, and then switch it off. If you keep the company of sadhus and remain connected to the mandir, you will be able to save yourself from the poison of TV. It is also essential to do *ghar sabha* every night for at least half an hour. All the family members should sit together and someone should read a spiritual book and thereafter interact with each other. If the atmosphere in your home remains charged with satsang, then the pollution of TV and other things will not affect you. By watching TV, you often waste time and students spoil their studies. In the long run, it spoils your eyes, mind and intellect. It also delays one's household work and may lead to quarrels and conflicts. Once you install a TV, you won't be able to restrain yourself in watching the news only. Eventually, you will start watching everything. The neighbours will also come to watch in your house and it may lead to lapses in moral behaviour."

Swamishri often discoursed about the harmful effects of TV and inspired countless to exercise restraint in watching it.

What was the secret behind Swamishri's achievement in redeeming countless from addictions? Mr Lamberty, Mayor of Nora, USA, offered the 'Key to Our Heart' to Swamishri and said, "We present this 'Key to Our Heart' to a luminary, who is capable of ruling over the hearts of all. This is the key of honouring a highly beloved personality." Then he added, "I declare today as 'Pramukh Swami Day'."

Shortly after, during a conversation with Swamishri, Mayor Lamberty said, "We ask for your special blessings to show us a path of success from the repeated failures we face in our campaigns against drug addiction."

(*Cont. on p. 43*)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations (1921–2022)

Behind the *Sacred* Relic

Pramukh Swami Maharaj with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj at Piccadilly Circus, 1995

MAHARAJ AND SWAMI AT THE FOREFRONT

On 18 August 1995, a grand, joyous and vibrant *nagar yatra* was held to honour the *murtis* to be consecrated in the newly built *shikharbaddha* BAPS Mandir in Neasden, London. It was the auspicious day of Janmashtami – Shravan *vad* 8 – the birthday of Bhagwan Krishna.

The procession began from Hyde Park and concluded at Trafalgar Square. Over 12,000 devotees, young and old, men and women, from throughout the UK, France, Portugal, USA, Canada, India, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and other countries enthusiastically joined in the *nagar yatra*, dancing, singing and proudly rejoicing on this historic auspicious occasion. Even the discomfort of being in the open, under the blazing 30°C sun did not bother anyone.

The exuberant devotees set off from Hyde Park Corner at 1.00 p.m., with the *nagar yatra* comprising seven floats carrying the *murtis* to be consecrated; three marching bands – from Leicester, Dallas and Nairobi – playing traditional devotional tunes; children, teenagers and youths in traditional costumes performing traditional dances; women devotees carrying coconut-topped *kalashes* as per ancient tradition; and many other

Pramukh Swami Maharaj with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj during a *padhramani* to the home of a devotee

Murti of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj placed at Piccadilly Circus during the *nagar yatra*

celebratory items. Thousands of passers-by lined the streets to witness this glorious *nagar yatra*.

Then, about 20 minutes after the start, the procession approached Piccadilly Circus. To everyone's utmost surprise, they had the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj seated on a platform in the middle of Piccadilly Circus, a scene that nobody had expected.

This unique darshan of Swamishri enhanced the beaming smiles and joyful expressions of all the devotees as they walked past Swamishri, bowing in reverence, and continued the procession. It was the highlight of the afternoon, a memory that everyone still treasures. Two days later, on 20 August 1995, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of the *shikharbaddha* mandir in London, the first traditional stone mandir in Europe.

However, only later did everyone learn that amid the makeshift arrangements made by the volunteers for Swamishri to sit at Piccadilly Circus, nobody had thought to place a *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

But Swamishri was prepared, since for him Maharaj and Swami were at the forefront of everything, especially on such momentous occasions as this. So, when he arrived, Swamishri insisted that a separate *asan* be prepared and the *murti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj[1] he had brought with him be placed next to him.

This demonstrates that for Swamishri, Maharaj and Swami are his focus. Even amid such an honour – the first time such an arrangement had been allowed at Piccadilly Circus – Swamishri offered his devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The *murti* he brought that day is seen in the photograph of Swamishri seated at Piccadilly Circus. This *murti* is presently preserved in the archives at BAPS Mandir, Sarangpur. It is a sacred relic that reminds us all to always follow Swamishri's lead in keeping Maharaj and Swami at the forefront of our lives in every situation. ◆

1. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had kept this *murti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj with him since 1985. Swamishri would take this *murti* with him to every house he visited for *padhramani* (see photo above). This *murti* has, thus, blessed the homes of countless devotees, fulfilled their wishes, accepted offerings of garlands and *prasad*, listened to Swamishri's prayers for devotees and swamis, inaugurated new projects, and much more. It was also the *murti* that Swamishri placed next to him in the London Nagar Yatra at Piccadilly Circus in 1995.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations (1921–2022)

Letters to Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired, influenced and impacted the lives of many people, young and old, men and women, in a multitude of ways. As we celebrate his birth centenary, we have reached out to the worldwide satsang community to express their feelings and memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the form of a letter addressed to him. This is a selection from the letters received so far.

I was living a meaningless life. Thank you for giving my no purpose life a purpose and goal. Thank you for making me realize where I was heading and where I should head. I am still learning, making mistakes, but by your blessings, I am sure I will become a true *satsangi*.

I am non-Gujarati, but still I am able to understand and learn from your discourses because you convey in language that a heart can understand.

Any combination of 26 letters cannot summarize how blessed I am. Thank you for always making me feel that no matter who I am, where I am from, my gender identity, you are always with me.

You are the brightest star in my universe. My mind wonders, "What have I done to deserve you?" Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Your selfless love, your sparkling eyes, and your divine actions, are all that I am grateful for.

You are my hero because, in spite of overwhelming obstacles, you have shown the strength to persevere and endure. You are the embodiment of purity and spirituality.

As I reflect back on this new life, I can honestly say I needed you the whole time. Thank you for holding my hand. Thank you for never giving up on me, even when I did not recognize you. Thank you for being with me, even when I thought I did not need you. And most of all, thank you for being patient with me.

- Rashi Shukla, 24, Pharmaceutical Professional, Ahmedabad

O Swami! I remember you more and more as the centenary celebration days are approaching. All the memories of your darshan in different places – praying in Surat temple, discoursing in the *sabha* hall, travelling in a golf cart or car, stopping near Palsana mandir to please the villagers, hand and face expressions at Sarangpur and others – come to my mind again and again.

Now, whenever I see your face I just pray to you that I can make you happy and live my life here like Akshardham. I really miss you Bapa, but I always feel that you are with me in the form of Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj.

- Dr. Priyanka A. Modi, 39, DivyaJivan Smart Technologies, Surat

I have always looked upon you as my inspirational person. Your life has inspired me in so many different ways. You have always taught me to do the best in life. I have kept your inspiring words with me. Bapa, you have always guided us to follow the right path in life and keep Maharaj and Swami in our thoughts in anything we do.

Bapa, you've taught me and my loved ones in satsang to follow the *niyams* and guru's *agna*. Bapa, you've taught me to be honest and never take *avgun*. To always respect parents and elders.

Each individual who came in your contact has either changed in their life or made a change in someone else's life. I remember when you were in Robbinsville in 2014. One night after *arti* you said, 'Jai Swaminarayan' to everyone. When I heard that amazing voice of yours it went straight to my heart, mind and soul. Even today, whenever I close my eyes and do your *mansi* I can hear your sweet voice saying 'Jai Swaminarayan'.

Thank you Bapa for everything you have done for me. Thank you for accepting me in satsang and guiding me. I will never forget you. Just like you say, 'I'll always be with you.'

- Navya M. Patel, 10, Student, Harleysville, USA

On Mahashivratri in 1998, when you blessed me for the first time I was three years old.

I perfectly recall the moment you put your hand on my head. I said, "Bapa, I would like to wear the *kanthi*." Straightaway, one swami said he will do that, as the queue was long and you were fasting on that day. But you said, "No, I have to insist to others to take *vartman* and wear the *kanthi*, while this *balak* is himself asking to wear the *kanthi*."

Then, you immediately held both my hands and put your hand below my father's hand, and asked for the water (for *vartman*) and a *kanthi*. Bapa, I will never forget your selfless love and blessings.

- Jaytirth Brahmabhatt, 27, Executive Engineer, Ahmedabad

You have kept me away from *kusang* and taught me to stay with the right people. As well as that, you have taught me key life lessons: to treat my parents like God, to pay attention in class and to always aim for the top. You have also blessed me with the gift of satsang, for which I am so grateful as it has got me closer to Bhagwan. You have also taught me humility, kindness and many other things.

Today, people have learnt and continue to learn so many things from the values you upheld. You truly changed the world.

- Hitanshu Patel, 14, Student, London, UK

When the sun rises,
There is shine everywhere,
But when the sun sets
There is no shine.
But you are my Sun
So, there is no sunset in my life.
You are always beside me,
You come wherever I go
You make me comfortable when I am alone.

- Riya Brahmabhatt, 8, Student, London, UK

Bapa, you have inspired many in this world and I am lucky that I was amongst them.

Your *parabhakti* towards Maharaj inspires me. Your love sustains me, your values inspire me and you made me understand who Shriji Maharaj is.

Everyone questions, Why mandirs? But you knew why mandirs. If it were not for mandirs, I would not have been writing this today.

Mandir has become our home now and will become for many others as they'll learn its benefits. When we go to the mandir, we experience Maharaj, Swami and our gurus; we experience utmost *shanti*. And as you said that even the mandirs will lack space to accommodate everyone; we see this happening.

I feel that mandirs hold everything. Through mandirs, we can listen to *katha varta*. We learn a lot from mandir *seva* and we explore our talents in our *sabhas*. Through mandirs you created an environment that attracts everyone to lead a spiritual life.

I never knew that I'd fall in love with you and through you in love with Maharaj – the best feeling ever.

I blossomed because of you, so may I always keep you *raji*!

- Dharti Patel, 22, Student, Nairobi, Kenya

My grandfather became a devotee in the 1970s. I was too young and as an immature teenager, I was badly influenced against the Sanstha.

However, when I first had your darshan, things immediately began to change in me. Every visit after 1984 that you made to South Africa made my thinking change and slowly but surely my love for you and the Sanstha grew significantly. I was a young medical student when I had a personal *mulakat* with you that changed my life. I began to avoid bad influences, started doing puja and *tilak-chandlo*. *Niyams* became a norm and being a BAPS devotee became a way of life for me.

The personal growth in me and my family was very welcome in our lives. Bapa, I am so thankful that you held my hand at the time.

Bapa, although we miss you so much, you have gifted us with Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thank you. We love Mahant Swami Maharaj and he has continued to instil all the good that you had.

- Kaushik Ranchod, 55, Neurologist, Johannesburg, South Africa

Your biggest gift to me was this satsang. I cannot stress enough the importance of satsang, for when you need stability of mind and it is there to help you. I was 21 years old and in my last year of engineering when my father passed away in April 2008, aged just 43. Everyone expected me and my family to be in immense shock. Honestly, we were for a few hours, but the way everyone regained themselves is nothing short of a miracle.

On the day of the cremation, I had to appear for the last exam of my last year. I left for my college straight from the crematorium ground, due to all the years of satsang and *sabha* I was able to keep my head straight, and sit the exam. Thanks to the satsang you gave me, not only was I able to write the paper, but I topped my class and received a gold medal. You had completely taken over my mind and heart and given me so much peace that it seems almost impossible now.

You knew my grandfather very well and his devotion so when you briefly met me on 31 December 2006 you told me only two words: 'Varso jalavje' (Retain your heritage), and I proudly intend to do so till my last breath.

- Anand Patel, 35, Businessman, Ahmedabad

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I never knew that I'd fall in love with you and through you in love with Maharaj – the best feeling ever.

I blossomed because of you, so may I always keep you *raji*!

- Dharti Patel, 22, Student, Nairobi, Kenya

Where would I be today, if I didn't have you in my life, dear Bapa? Just thinking this sends cold shivers down my spine. I am ever so grateful that you found me and held me close to you. Just as a child might let go of a mother's hand but the mother's grip stays ever firm, even greater than that was your grip on me. Just as a mother lovingly and heartily forgives all her children's mistakes, even greater than that was your forever forgiving nature towards me. You never scolded me, but always lovingly won me over and made me see things differently.

Through every step of the way, you held my hand and guided me. At every step of the way you constantly thought about us. Always us. Never yourself. You connected with me through countless ways: sometimes through a hug, at other times through your hand gestures; the flick of your *chhadi* held my very heart and seeing you accept a *chadar* enveloped my very soul; hearing the sound of the siren made my heart skip a beat and having your darshan in the *jharukho* added a bounce to my feet. O Swami Bapa, the *smrutis* you have left me with are ingrained within my heart and embedded deep down in my soul.

At times I let you down, at times I was not at my best behaviour, at times I took all that you so lovingly gave me for granted and yet through it all you were the one still carrying me and holding me strong. You forgave me ever so quickly and you sheltered me from every storm.

My sincerest prayer to you today is that may you forever stay in my heart. May I behold the tiniest of *smrutis* that you have ever so lovingly blessed me with, and remember them every day.

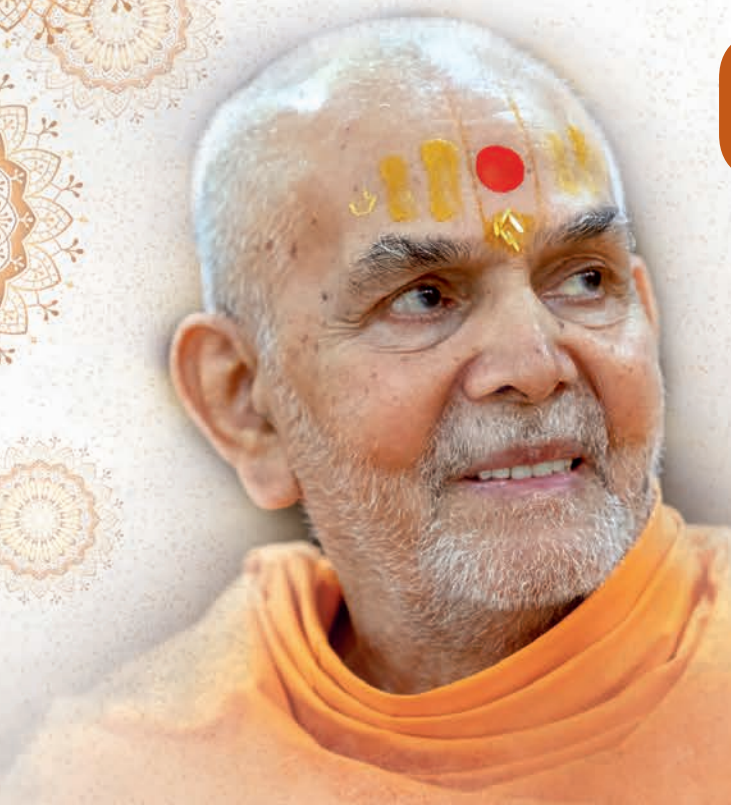
- Anon

We invite anyone wishing to contribute to write a letter (max. of 500 words) and send it by email to **letterstopsm**100**@gmail.com** or WhatsApp to +91 7069060900.

Please include your name, age, city and country of residence, occupation/study and mobile number.

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

GURU BHAKTI



In the Vachanamrut, the most important shastra of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed the Vedic Akshar-Purushottam Darshan – the underlying core understanding with which devotees of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya should offer devotion to attain *moksha*.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has described that Akshar or Aksharbrahma is the ideal devotee of Purushottam or Parabrahma, and that both are eternally divine and beyond the influence of *maya*. *Jivas* and *ishwars* take birth on earth and strive to transcend *maya* to attain Purushottam. To assist them across this barrier, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has stated that the Gunatit/spiritually enlightened/God-realized sadhu/guru serves as a bridge.

This exemplary Gunatit Guru epitomizes the virtues an aspirant must develop to become eligible for *moksha*. To attain these virtues an aspirant must associate profoundly with Akshar, whose life and teachings guide him on the spiritual path. This association is the bridge that enables an aspirant to traverse the barrier of *maya* and reach the divine abode – Akshardham – where he forever enjoys the darshan and *seva*/service of Purushottam.

Thus, it is through such guru bhakti towards the Gunatit Guru that *moksha* is attained. And the Gunatit Guru is again the ideal example of such guru bhakti. Each Gunatit Guru excels in devotion to his gurus and serves as the template for all devotees to emulate. Mahant Swami Maharaj has shown us through his life and teachings just how we should offer guru bhakti. Even his apparently subtle actions reflect his deep and constant guru bhakti. The following demonstrate how we, too, should offer guru bhakti to our gurus.

5 MAY 2016, NADIAD

Swamishri was on his way to Yogi Farm in Jigneshbhai Panchal's car.

Jigneshbhai said, "I am building a new house. Please give me permission to name it 'Keshav Palace'.

Swamishri refused and said, "Keep Pramukh Swami Maharaj's name."

Jigneshbhai said, "Up to now all my building sites have been based on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's name. Now please give permission to use your name."

Swamishri said, "Everything is included in his name."

27 MAY 2018, RAJKOT

After puja, Swamishri was taking his medicine, when Brahmavatsal Swami asked, "Swami, when you go for darshan of the gurus, you always climb two steps. Is it to get a closer darshan or because you like to climb steps?"

Swamishri said, "To get closer darshan" Brahmavatsal Swami said, "We do not have such *shraddha*."

Swamishri instantly remembered Yogiji Maharaj and said, "I have seen Yogiji Maharaj's *shraddha*. It was the month of Vaishakh and very hot. Yogi Bapa was leaving Sarangpur to go to Jamrala, so he went for Thakorji's darshan. Then, he went to use the bathroom. After this, before leaving, he again went for Thakorji's darshan in the main mandir. So, Sant Swami said, 'This is the way of the Satpurush.' Only a few minutes earlier he had been for darshan but he went again."

For Mahant Swami Maharaj, his guru is his ideal.

29 MAY 2021, NENPUR

During a video recording for a question-answer session to be shown during the *kishore-kishori shibirs* in North America, the following questions were asked.

Q: What is the true definition of guru bhakti?

Swamishri: Affection for the guru and to do and live as per his instructions. Also, *divyabhav* towards the guru. This is guru bhakti.

Q: With what thought do you continuously offer guru bhakti? How do you view Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj that you continue to offer them guru bhakti?

Swamishri: Everything is included in the guru. I constantly think that I am Aksharrup and have to offer *upasana* to Purushottam. If you contemplate on this *prapti* and *mahima* that is guru Bhakti.

Q: What joy did you experience in the presence of your gurus?

Swamishri: First, they are like God – through them we have actually attained God. So, that gives so much happiness. This *prapti* (attainment) gives limitless joy.

Q: If the *param ekantik sant* is recognized, then how is guru bhakti offered?

Swamishri: Just as Bhagatji Maharaj offered bhakti (to Gunatitanand Swami) Shastriji Maharaj offered bhakti (to Bhagatji Maharaj), Yogi Bapa offered bhakti to (Shastriji Maharaj) and Pramukh Swami Maharaj offered bhakti (to Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj), we should offer bhakti. Since everything is true; there is not even a trace of untruth. We have attained a pure gold coin.

Q: How can we cultivate *mahima* for our gurus like you have?

Swamishri: First, everything is attained by knowledge and understanding, otherwise everything remains superficial and fleeting. But with resolute *mahima* and *nishtha* in Maharaj and Swami we experience unending joy.

The steps to understanding the guru's mahima are *shravan, manan, nididhyas* and *shakshatkar.*

Shravan is to listen and adopt what is useful. Then, do *manan.* Repeatedly recall the talks we have accepted and like. Only then will they become ingrained. Even worldly knowledge has to be repeatedly remembered. And this is spiritual wisdom, it is eternal. It is forever true. Then, *nididhyas* is that it is embedded in one's *jiva* and is never lost. Doing such *shravan, manan* and *nididhyas* leads to *shakshatkar.*

- Mahant Swami Maharaj's words on innumerable occasions reveals his guru bhakti:
  - Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done everything. He has left nothing undone.
  - Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wishes are my wishes.
  - You have Swami Bapa's blessings, and my prayers.
  - Yogi Bapa likes the *thal* of *samp, suhradbhav* and *dasbhav,* so I also like them.
  - Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj are the forms of God.
- Once, Vinu Bhagat was with Yogi Bapa in Nadiad. From here, they were go to their next destination by train. Due to the crowds in train, the possibility of having to fast (if touched by a woman) was high. So, they would have to have a heavy breakfast. On the breakfast menu were *pattarveliya,* which Vinu Bhagat liked a lot. But when the server approached him to give him some, Yogi Bapa said, "No , no. He does not like *pattarveliya.* He likes *mamra* (puffed rice)." Vinu Bhagat took this one statement from Yogi Bapa to heart and for six decades he did not eat *pattarveliya* at all. And in memory to this occasion, he begins breakfast by eating *mamra.*
- In 1956, Vinubhai (Mahant Swami Maharaj before he had taken *diksha*) was with Yogiji Maharaj in Bhadran. One day, Vinubhai suffered from severe stomach pains. So, Yogiji Maharaj treated him with a traditional, tried-and-tested, remedy. As part of the method, Yogiji Maharaj clasped Vinubhai's hands lifted him up to a sitting position. Then he told Vinubhai to grasp the big toes of his feet, while he fetched some balls of ginger, gur and ghee (*soothni goli*). For 45 minutes, Vinubhai sat patiently in this posture waiting for Yogiji Maharaj to return and followed his instructions to the letter.
- After Pramukh Swami Maharaj's return to Akshardham, Mahant Swami Maharaj continued to visit satsang centres everywhere. In one centre, the youths continually hailed 'Mahant Swami Maharaj ni jai'. Expressing his disapproval, Swamishri told them. "First proclaim 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj ni jai'. He must always be remembered first. I am his *sevak.*" Then, further revealing his anguish, Swamishri said, "When you do all this without hailing Pramukh Swami Maharaj, I feel such pain as if both my arms are being cut off!"

Once, he also said, "Without proclaiming 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj *ni jai*' everything is meaningless."

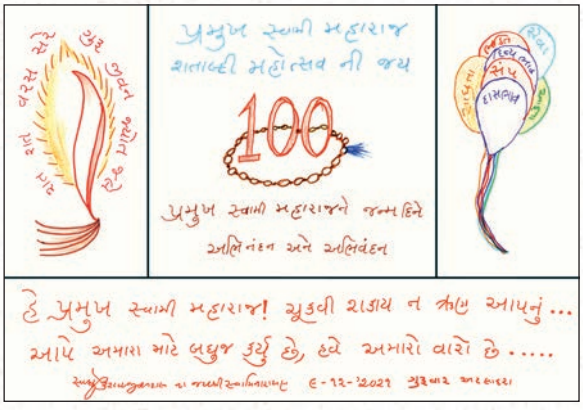
Such is Mahanat Swami Maharaj's guru bhakti. He always respects and keeps his gurus at the forefront.

30 SEPTEMBER 2021, SARANGPUR

During a question-answer session, Swamishri was asked, "As soon as your final college exams finished, you went directly to Yogiji Maharaj. Did you not wish to go home first?"

Swamishri replied, "Yogi Bapa's attraction was so powerful that I left everything and went to him."

11 DECEMBER 2021, ATLADARA



Today marked guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 100th birthday. As a tribute to him, Mahant Swami Maharaj spent 80 minutes preparing a special card to mark the centenary and express his sentiments. ◆

The BRIDGE to GOD

What is a bridge and what does it do?
It may be old or may be new.
It may be short or can be long,
But it's always built to be sturdy and strong.

Sometimes it's wide, sometimes narrow,
Sometimes high and sometimes low.
Over rushing rivers and deep valleys
Some near the ground, some touching the clouds.

Bridges help you overcome an obstacle
Making your trip from A to B possible.
A safe passage from start to finish
A journey you can freely enjoy and cherish.

Life is your path from birth to the end,
Me and mine are what you defend.
Worldly thrills and joys are not your goal,
They merely burden and corrupt your soul.

The Guru is Akshar, the bridge that you seek
Taking you, the *atma*, to the feet of Paramatma.
The Gunatit Guru removes all fear,
And to God he takes you near.

The Guru is the face of God,
The Guru is the voice of God,
Who is the Guru in whom dwells this
Supreme Divine Shakti?
Only one who lives by the Ekantik
Quad of Dharma, Jnan, Vairagya and Bhakti.

From the Guru you will learn this norm,
That the *atma* is your true inner form.
Then from all troubles you'll be freed,
Ending the birth and death cycle indeed.

Keep the Guru's company and do as he says,
On each and every one of your days.
Hold his hands and you'll be safe,
From the binds of the world you will escape.

The living Guru is the bridge without any faults,
Your passage to the treasures of the divine spiritual vault.
The Guru is selfless and your ultimate guide,
He is the bridge to God with whom you'll forever reside. ◆

LIFE: Dr Ajay K. Makan (Johannesburg, South Africa)

RESULT-ORIENTED LIFE and STRESS

The practise of vairagya is a form of stress management demonstrated in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

AN OUTCOME DRIVEN SOCIETY

We live by Newton's third law of motion: For every action in nature there is an equal and opposite reaction. This law of physics is taught to us in high school, and accepted to be logical and ingrained from a young age. We learn to be outcome driven and solution or result orientated in whatever work we do. We work on the presumption that the fruits of our labour will make us happy. We become goal orientated and expect appropriate compensation and rewards for the products of our endeavours. The rewards we expect come in the form of fortune, fame, position, power or prestige.

We assume that acquiring a big house, luxury car and fashionable clothes will result in happiness. To achieve these rewards we work long hours, sacrificing family time and our health in the process. We prepare to be measured in our workplaces on KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and other outcome driven tools. We run faster on the human hamster wheel by enduring tough working conditions, crazy deadlines and challenging bosses at an intensity that is unsustainable and impossible at times.

We live in a society that is completely outcome or result driven. From a young age we are wired to compare, compete and be better than the rest. We cajole, fight and manipulate in order to get a particular outcome. This leads to stress resulting in physical and mental illnesses. Medically, it is accepted that many illnesses are lifestyle driven as we chase the fruits of our endeavours in order to feel happy. Our mind sees no other way.

MANIFESTATION OF ILLNESS

It's not surprising therefore that we are seeing an increase in mental illnesses due to work stress. In 2019, the World Health Organization included burnout in the International Classification of Diseases. More and more people are succumbing to feeling that they cannot cope and cannot keep up. They feel pressured, overwhelmed and overburdened. No matter how hard they work, it never is good enough. As hard as they do work, there are only 24 hours in a day. In Japan, there is a word, 'karoshi', literally translated to mean 'death by overwork'. The most common medical causes of karoshi deaths are heart attacks, strokes due to stress and suicide, all due to work related stress.

IMPACT ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

It is not only in our work that we chase results, but also within our family and communities. Of particular concern within families is the pressure we put on our children to achieve results, be it academically or in sports. It is becoming more common for doctors to treat children with high levels of anxiety due to the expectations their parents impose on them. Living up to parental expectations continues into adulthood; for example, choice of studies and career.

THE PURSUIT OF FREEDOM

Yet we feel that if we achieve our goals, fame and fortune will set us free. We will thus become forever joyful and bask in prestige. Therefore, from a young age we spend our lives chasing goals, from school to university and then the workplace. We are also expected to deal with family and community expectations. It's as if we are running on a hamster wheel that goes around in circles. The wheel turns and we hope it will deliver the results we want. We get caught up in a never-ending loop. We try to step off by running faster, so that we achieve our end goal. However, we all end up exhausted within the wheel.

Today's modern and materialistic society, driven by a winner takes all attitude, brainwashes us into believing that the more we have, the happier we will be. Tons of books, courses and seminars are written on how to achieve our goals and ensure that we get the outcome we desire. Social media drives this insatiable appetite of chasing fame and fortune: the more likes and followers we have, the more we are expected to be happier. We seek constant appreciation to acknowledge we've arrived.

However, not all are guaranteed of a success story. We learn early in life that in spite of all our actions, we do not get the reaction or result we desire. Despite hard work and effort, we do not achieve the fruits of our labour. For every one success story we hear of, there are a thousand shattered dreams and disappointments. We become slaves to the system and wonder why we cannot break free.

FEAR OF FAILURE

When people are generally asked, what is it they fear the most. The answer inevitably is failure. From the day we start school, it is ingrained that failure is unacceptable. We feel we have failed when we don't accomplish the goals that society, family or we expect. We become stressed due to the pressure we impose on ourselves. One definition of stress is the gap between reality and our expectations. We interpret this gap as failure.

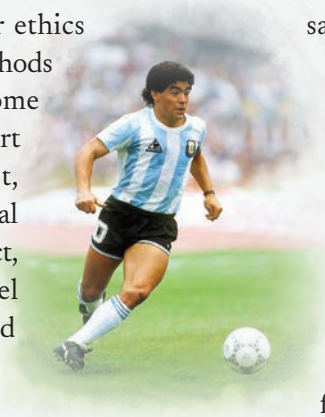
Invariably, frustration sets in. We feel incomplete and unfulfilled. We don't know what to do or where to turn. It's not surprising that we are seeing an increase in mental illness as a result. Stress results in an increase in mood disorders such as burnout, depression and anxiety. We sacrifice who we are and it is no surprise that our values are thrown aside on our path to worldly success. We begin to accept that the end result is more important than the path we take to get there.

DOES THE END JUSTIFY THE MEANS?

Diego Maradona, the famous footballer, scored twice – including the 'hand of God' goal – to knock England out of the 1986 World Cup. The late Argentinian player described his opening goal as "a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God". The referee did not have a clear view and allowed the goal to stand. Minutes later, Maradona dribbled past a host of England players to score again, a strike that was voted as the goal of the century. Argentina went on to win the World Cup. Now, in May 2022, the shirt Maradona wore when he scored those goals, sold for a record-breaking £7.1 million in an auction.

We become so focused on attaining a winning outcome, be it at school, home or work, that we

compromise or totally sacrifice our ethics and principles. The processes and methods we utilize to achieve outcomes become corrupt. If we are competing, we resort to cheating so that we will be first, even at the expense of others. The goal negates the means. Yet, if we introspect, we will recognize how empty we feel and wonder why we are not fulfilled despite achieving our goals.



AS STATED IN THE SCRIPTURES

The Bhagavad Gita states, – "*Karmanye vādhikāraste mā phaleshu kadāchana...* – You have the right to action or work but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction" (2.47). Our guru *parampara* epitomizes this statement in their words, character and actions. It is a mindset shift in how they approach the work they do. Through their life activities our gurus demonstrate, they do their absolute best and leave the outcome to be determined by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Shriji Maharaj in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 2 explains, "A person who has the highest level of *vairagya* engages in worldly activities... is not affected by those activities. He may indulge in the most alluring of the *panchvishays*... but he does so dejectedly and with total indifference towards them. Those *vishays* are unable to entice him; thus his renunciation remains undiminished."

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S DESCRIPTION OF RENUNCIATION

Abdul Kalam, in his book, *Transcendence,* describes to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "Swamiji, when I first launched a rocket it failed, and I became very depressed and disheartened. At the time I thought of becoming a sannyasi and giving up everything." Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, "The Bhagavad Gita defines renunciation in a unique way, 'One must renounce not the performance of deeds, but renounce the desire for the fruits of those actions.'... Human effort and God's grace move this world. Even failure of the first rocket, which you faced, was for your good; it prodded you to make things better."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj offered a unique and powerful perspective on how to approach all the works we do. It was the same unique principle that drove our guru *parampara* in all the works they did – the principle of complete detachment to the fruits of actions. All they sought was *rajipo* of God and guru.

They were never driven by fame, fortune, power, position or prestige. In 1997, some youths suggested that Pramukh Swami be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. It would be a great honour and his name would reach all corners of the world. Then, everyone would know about what Swami Bapa had accomplished. However, before they could continue, Pramukh Swami Maharaj stopped them and said, "I have attained Bhagwan Swaminarayan and gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. For me they are Nobel Prizes." He then told the sadhus and devotees that worldly awards do not last, and that it is best to worship God. Pramukh Swami Maharaj demonstrated that all he cared and lived for was the *rajipo* of his gurus. As much as Swami Bapa received and accepted accolades, he had no interest in gaining the key to the cities he was awarded, roads that were named after him or being praised in a grand assembly.

GOD – THE ALL-DOER

Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer. This means that everything, good and bad, that happens is due to Maharaj's wish. Swami Bapa lived steadfastly by this principle and took absolute comfort in knowing that. An example was the court case regarding the Harrow land for the London mandir. Despite the amount of time and resources that Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and the devotees put into the case, BAPS lost the case. All those involved in the UK and in India were devastated at the verdict. Yet, Pramukh Swami Maharaj remained calm on hearing about the outcome. He believed according to Vachanamrut Gadhada I 78 that without God's wish not even a blade of grass flutters. He also told the mandir trustees that whatever Shriji Maharaj had done was for our good and that something better would result from the failure.

Once in Junagadh, Dr Chhaya, asked Swamishri, "I cannot properly manage five staff members in my clinic, yet how do you manage such a large organization?"

"God is the all-doer," Swamishri replied succinctly.

"That is true, but you are the instrument. How do you manage everything?" the doctor persisted.

"By believing God to be the all-doer everyone is inspired to make effort. Because God resides in everyone, therefore he is the inspirer. One should do one's work by understanding the glory of everyone, by pleasing God and understanding him to be the all-doer. One should also pray to God for one's intentions to be pure and to give everyone the strength to work."

DETACHED & STRESS-FREE

Pramukh Swami Maharaj paid no heed to the accolades he received. He had no inclination towards power, position or prestige. Once, an aspirant said to Swamishri, "If you become the prime minister [of India], then I will become the finance minister." Swamishri instantly responded, "Everything is perishable. This world itself is perishable. The type of joy derived from God's worship and chanting the *mala* cannot be found elsewhere."

In 2003, Dr Mangal Patel, chairman of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly, came for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's darshan and blessings. On learning about the sheer expanse of services performed by Swamishri, he asked in amazement, "How do you manage to peacefully run more than 500 mandirs and the Satsang fellowship that has spread in India and abroad?"

Swamishri humbly replied, "I am not running anything. It is my guru and God who are running everything. I do not believe that I am doing something. God is the doer of everything. However, when one believes that one is doing everything and when things don't work out properly, one becomes depressed. One should make all the efforts, but the fruits of one's actions depend upon God. And if one does not get success, one should firmly believe that it was for one's own benefit.

"Our guruji taught us that if you fill a pot with water and place it on your head, you will feel its burden. But when you dive in water, despite the pressure of 'tons' of water on your head, you do not feel the weight. So, I am not doing anything. God and the guru are doing everything.

"There is no end to pain and misery due to ego and possessiveness. So, I constantly believe that God and the guru are the all-doers. That is how the entire Sanstha is run."

Thus, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was without stress, frustration and irritation in all his endeavours. He taught us not to see ourselves as the doer, be it at school, at university, in our career or in family life. To cope in this day and age we must give our absolute effort, yet not focus on the fruits of our labours. Whatever spiritual efforts and services we perform should be solely to attain Bhagwan's and the guru's *rajipo*. As Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj has said on numerous occasions, "Do your best and leave the rest," or another way of interpreting the statement is: Do your best and let Swamishri take care of the rest. ◆

Climbing the J Curve

In this article we will review the J Curve theory discussed by Ian Bremmer and how this can be viewed in a personal and spiritual context.

WHAT IS THE J-CURVE?

It resembles the Nike Swoosh and, at a subtle level, even teaches Nike's famous message: 'Just Do It'.

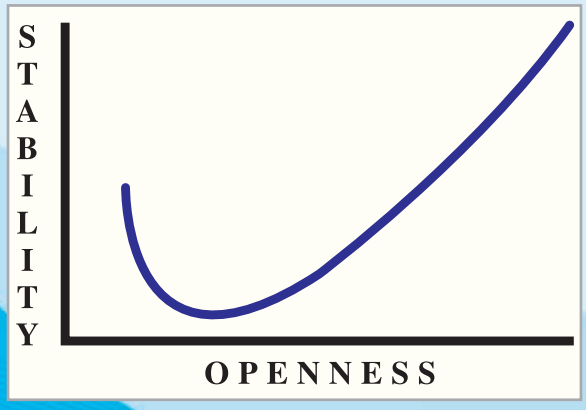
The J Curve is so named because visually it looks like the letter 'J' and is used as a graphical representation of ideas in a variety of fields: medicine, economics, private equity, country status and political science. It takes various forms as shown in the diagrams below.

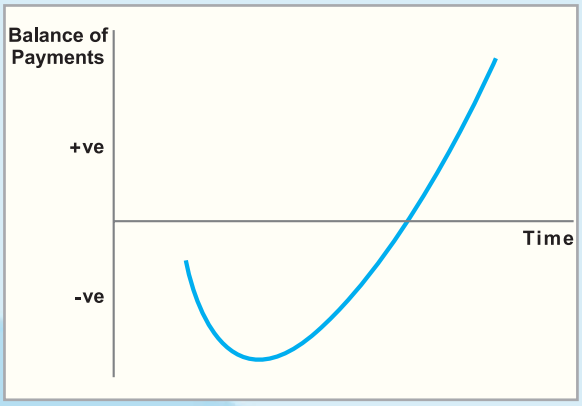
STABILITY VS OPENNESS

In his thought-provoking book *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, political analyst Ian Bremmer proposes the J Curve as a model to describe the stability of countries with respect to their openness.

A plot of the stability of a nation in the face of internal and external shocks on the Y-axis against its political and economic openness results in a J-shaped graph with the following characteristics:

1. Totalitarian states, such as, Iran, North Korea and Saudi Arabia are on the left of the curve and enjoy a moderate level of stability, due to their authoritarian controls.
2. On the extreme right of the curve are highly open and highly stable countries such as USA, UK, Germany and other established democracies.
3. The right side of the curve results in greater stability if openness is achieved. However, authoritarian countries on the left do attain a modest level of stability due to the controls they impose. Yet these same controls limit the level of stability that is achieved in these countries.
4. The slope on the left side is much steeper than on the right. This means that open societies on the right are very stable and would require tremendous disruptive forces to destabilize them. In contrast, however, autocratic regimes may be stable at any particular point in time, but are fragile and susceptible to becoming rapidly unstable. A sudden challenge from internal or external forces can readily disrupt the status





quo, leading to disorder and confusion and a swift decline in stability.

5. The path from a stable, yet fragile, closed society to a more stable and resilient society is not linear. The period of transition is characterized by a dip in the curve (the dipping point), signifying greater instability. During this period, if the authoritarian regime loses patience and courage, it may forego the potential benefits of long-term stability in an attempt to regain short-term stability by re-imposing its autocratic controls and thus scamper back up the left side of the curve to a position of reduced openness but short-term stability. Thus, this inevitable dip needs to be prudently negotiated.

There are many factors which contribute to the openness or otherwise of a country, and hence its stability. Democracy is not the only factor, as Ian Bremmer writes, "History, geography, culture and other factors give each state its own particular strengths and vulnerabilities. As a consequence, each state has its own J Curve, though each curve retains the same basic shape."

Now let us consider how the J Curve can be applied to spirituality in individuals.

SPIRITUALITY AND THE J CURVE

Imagine a plot of inner peace and happiness on the vertical (y) axis against observance of spiritual disciplines and faith in God on the horizontal (x) axis. Such a plot would likely resemble a J curve with a steep left side, trough and a shallower but higher right side.

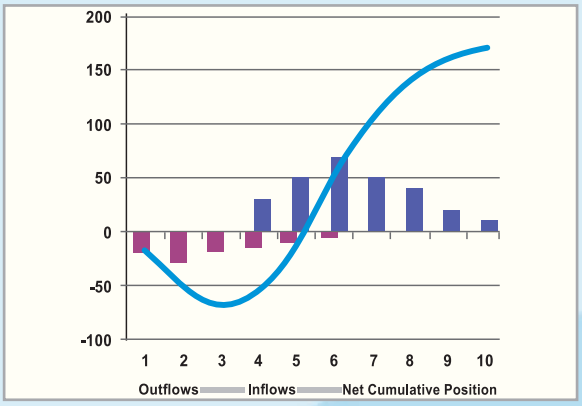
A person who transgresses spiritual codes or does not have faith in God may feel a certain level of inner peace or happiness, but will never reach the level of peace or happiness experienced by one who abides by spiritual codes and has faith in God.

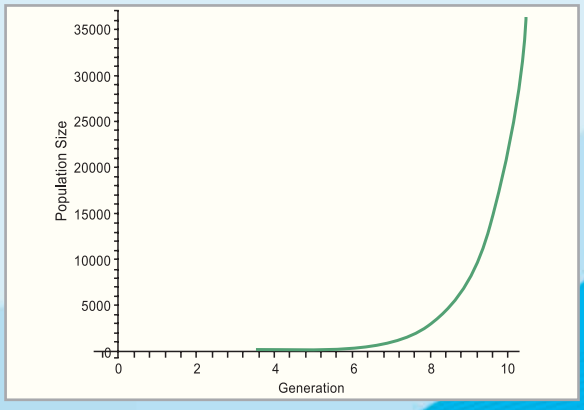
The former has achieved a type of stability that is dependent on perishable, ever-changing material factors and is thus subject to rapid destabilization when these factors are disturbed. For example, a person may be dependent on material pleasures from which a certain level of enjoyment is experienced. But when such pleasures are not available there is likely to be a rapid decline in personal stability and loss of inner peace. This is similar to the situation of authoritarian states that are liable to descend into chaos due to disruptive forces that challenge their autocratic methods.

On the other hand, a person on the right side of the J Curve may encounter disturbances in life, but the steadying power of faith absorbs such disruption and limits the loss of inner peace just as a right side of the J Curve country is able to withstand internal and external shocks.

So, for a non-spiritual person on the left of the curve to develop the spirituality which will raise the level of inner peace and happiness the transition dip has to be successfully negotiated.

The success or failure of this change is





determined by patient, persistent pursuit and proper implementation of the necessary factors.

On the left side of the curve, materially minded people who courageously persist and decide to battle through the inner turmoil encountered during the period of transition emerge on the right side and benefit from higher levels of inner peace and personal stability.

To aid this transition it is important to remain in the appropriate company.

Bremmer mentions, "A state with no stability is a failed state; it can neither implement nor enforce government policy. Such a country can fragment, it can be taken over by outside forces, or it can descend into chaos."

This happened to Somalia in 1991 when rival tribes tried to oust the dictator and fought each other. This in-fighting resulted in half a million deaths and 750,000 refugees. Further, in August 2005 South Africa expressed concern about the possibility of neighbouring Zimbabwe becoming such a failed state. Since, as Bremmer points out, "When state failure strikes your neighbour, the resulting chaos can undermine your stability as well, as refugees, armed conflict, and disease spill across borders."

Similarly, avoiding the company of spiritually failed persons is essential to preserving one's inner peace and happiness. Moreover, the company of spiritually successful people will help one to successfully weather the turmoil of the transition dip and attain greater peace and happiness. In short, the company one keeps is an important contributing factor to one's own failure or success.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan emphasizes this point in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 70, "By avoiding the company of external *kusangis* (read, 'failed' people) and by keeping the company of only the Sant (read, 'spiritually successful' people) residing externally, the force of the *kusangis* decreases and force of the Sant increases."

It is during this critical, make or break, transition period that the right support is essential. If such support is not attained, a person is likely to revert to the previous state of material indulgence – a state in which he feels at ease, but will not experience long-term inner peace.

OVERCOMING ADDICTIONS

A person dependent on alcohol, drugs, tobacco and other addictive substances lies on the left of the curve, feeling a certain, though limited and fragile, level of happiness. When the substances that sustain this joy are denied – that is, there is a disruptive force – such a person rapidly descends into inner turmoil. If such a person resolves to become free of these addictive substances, it will be necessary to face the period of transition with courage and determination, as well as appropriate moral and social support. If there is a lack of such courage and determination (internal factors) or support (external factors), the person is likely to revert to dependence on addictive substances.

It is of long-term benefit to such individuals, and their families that they shed such addictive habits. They are aware of the fact that freedom from such habits results in greater joy and a more stable life – just as autocratic countries know that open societies are more stable.

DISCUSSION

Each individual has to make a choice. Are they prepared to struggle through the dip and emerge on the other side where they will reap more and better rewards or will they give up and return to their previous state? The J Curve is thus a useful model helping one to visualize the joy of life. Its warning about potential pitfalls of the transition dip enables appropriate preparation to prevent failure.

So, to return to the Nike Swoosh and its famous catchphrase, once one's goal for attaining greater peace and happiness is set, one has to surmount all problems and do whatever is necessary. That is, one must 'Just Do It'. ◆

Personal Rituals
NITYA PUJA

In the last issue, we discussed personal rituals involved in five limbs of ashtang yoga. In this sixth article, we discuss rituals of morning worship known as nitya puja.

Hindus practise puja ritual after having their obligatory morning bath. Obligatory because it purifies the body and refreshes the mind. Hence, this ritual is known as *pratah snan* – morning bath.

Many perform a simple puja ritual such as lighting and waving a *diya* or burning an incense stick in front of the deity in the home shrine. Others may offer slightly more elaborate rituals as prescribed in their *sampradaya*.

In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya about 16 rituals constitute *nitya puja* which collectively span about 25 or more minutes. After bathing and wearing washed clothes, devotees sit down facing either north or east – the two auspicious directions for puja. Males then imprint *tilak-chandlo* on their forehead while females apply only a *chandlo.* For the *tilak*, *chandan* (sandwood paste) is used and kumkum for *chandlo*. These are auspicious substances which charge the *agna chakra* on the forehead throughout the day.

Then one meditates (dhyan). This involves *atmachintan* – regarding oneself as 'atma', 'akshar' which transcends the three bodies: physical, mental and causal. Then one contemplates about the goal of life: to become *aksharrup* to realize and worship Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Mahant Swami Maharaj has also added another important sentiment to introspection, "What have I come to do and what am I doing [to realize this goal]!

One then does *mansi* – mental visualization of awakening and bathing Bhagwan and guru Mahant Swami Maharaj, offering them *shangar* of rich garments, garlands and other adornments. Now they are ready to be invoked in puja. The principle of worshipping the Gunatit guru with equal reverence as Bhagwan is advocated in the following *shloks – Guru Brahma, guru Vishnu...*, *Guru Govind donu khade...,* and by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Vachanamrut Vartal 5.

One then arranges the puja *murtis* on the cloth *asan* and utters the *ahvan* mantra to invoke Bhagwan and the Gunatit gurus in puja (Satsang Diksha 64–65):

Uttishtha Sahajānanda Shri-Hare Purushottama;
Gunātitā'kshara brahmann-uttishtha krupayā guro.
Āgamyatām hi pujārtham āgamyatām mad-ātmataha;
Sānnidhyād darshanād divyāt saubhāgyam
vardhate mama.

"O Sahajanand Shri Hari! O Purushottam! O Aksharbrahma Gunatit gurus! Please shower compassion [upon me] and awaken. Please

come forth from my *atma*, to accept my puja. I become more blessed due to your divine presence and darshan."

One then does 11, 25 or more *malas*, chanting the 'Swaminarayan' mantra while turning each bead. The benefits of mantra chanting were discussed in article one.

For a detailed explanation of all the rituals of *nitya* puja, see chapter 28 in *Hindu Rites & Rituals: sentiments, sacraments & symbols,* 2010, 2nd ed. Then the *tapni mala* is performed by standing on the left leg, with the right leg bent at the knee, in the same posture as Nilkanth Varni, in remembrance of his austerities at Muktinath during his 7-year *kalyan yatra.*

One then performs 5 or 11 *pradakshinas,* after which males offer six *dandvat pranams* and females offer *panchang pranams.* The underlying sentiment of this ritual is *sharanagati* – accepting Bhagwan's refuge with total humility. Bhagwan Swaminarayan advocated the sixth *dandvat* in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 40, as a form of atonement for knowingly or unknowingly maligning (commiting *droh*) a devotee.

After *pranams* one sits in *mansi* with both palms facing upwards to offer delicious foods which one likes. Then one offers *prarthana* with palms joined for "protection from one's *indriyas,* attachments of 'I' and 'mine', undesirable company (*kusang*) and blessings for any other upcoming stressful event such as an exam, interview, etc." Then it is time to bid farewell and gratitude by chanting the *punaragaman* mantra (Satsang Diksha 73):

Bhaktyaiva divya-bhāvena pujā te sam-anushthitā,
Gachchhā'tha tvam mad-ātmānam
Akshara-Purushottama.

"O Purushottam Narayan together with Aksharbrahma! I have performed your puja with devotion and *divyabhav*. Now, please reside within my *atma*."

One then does *charan sparsh* of the *murtis* with the second and third fingers of the right hand and then touches one's eyes with them. Then one reads five *shloks* from the Shikshapatri and Satsang Diksha and for a few moments reflects upon their meanings and how sincerely one is abiding by them.

Then one gathers the *murtis* and other puja objects, folds them in the cloth *asan*, and places them in the puja case. One then offers *panchang pranams* to one's parents, grandparents and other elders in the home.

SENTIMENTS OF NITYA PUJA

Nitya puja personally connects us with Bhagwan and guru. By their immense *krupa* – compassion or grace – they manifest in puja by our chanting of the *ahvan* mantra. On 28 October 2021, Mahant Swami Maharaj revealed, "In puja, we have a chance to talk with Bhagwan. In puja Bhagwan and the guru *parampara* are specially present. Whether we believe it or not, even if our mind is distracted elsewhere, even then they certainly arrive in puja."

It is a way of offering *sakhya* bhakti by regarding them as intimate friends to whom one can divulge all personal problems uninhibitedly. It is a most sacred and fulfilling ritual. Seemingly simple, this 20-minute ritual acts like a sustained release medication which invigorates us for the next 24 hours without any side effects. How do we know whether Bhagwan has accepted our *prarthana*? Simple. One feels de-stressed and spiritually charged to face the day's silent ripples or stormy turbulences.

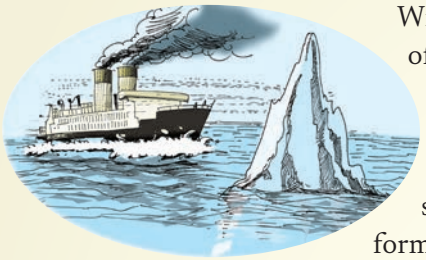
On introspection in the evening after the day's activities, one may realize how smoothly the day passed despite the potential obstacles one had expected. This indicates that one's *prarthana* in puja was heard. Yet occasionally, when our wishes during *prarthana* do not materialize we should believe that Bhagwan probably considered it unfavourable for us in the long term.

In the next and seventh article, we shall discuss the personal ritual of *mansi puja,* in which one performs puja mentally. ◆

INSPIRATIONS

A potpourri of inspiring and interesting information and wisdom

MURTI MAGNETISM

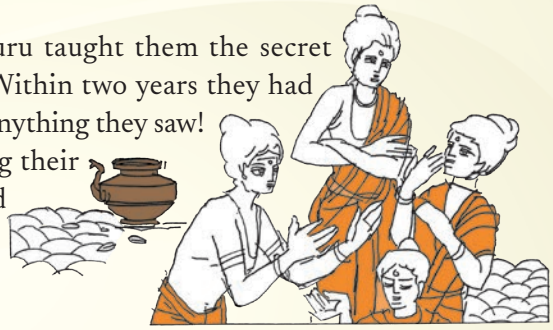


With comprehensive spiritual knowledge, one realizes the divinity of God and his magnetic appeal to all who have faith in him. In Vachanamrut Vartal 13, Shriji Maharaj reveals how engaging in the darshan of the *murti* of God with faith and understanding leads to an experience of divine bliss, "By appearance, God's form appears similar to that of any human; however, it is an exceptionally divine form. For example, a magnetic rock appears similar to all the other rocks on the earth; yet there is a natural magical property in it – when a ship sails past a mountain of magnetic rock, then all the iron nails of the ship are drawn towards the magnetic rock. Similarly, when a person does darshan of God's form with *shraddha*, be it the form of a king or the form of a sadhu, his *indriyas* are drawn towards God. Then one attains *samadhi*."

- Analogy from Vachanamrut

GIVING LIFE TO THE DEAD

Four Brahmin brothers lived together. Their guru taught them the secret knowledge of Sanjeevani – giving life to the dead. Within two years they had mastered the art and could virtually breathe life into anything they saw!



It was then time for them to return home. During their journey back they found some bones under a tamarind tree. The youngest brother questioned, "Whose bones are these?" The second brother answered, "They look like lion bones."

"Oh let us try out our Sanjeevani knowledge that guruji has taught us," the youngest said. Not waiting for approval, he mumbled a mantra and sprinkled some water on the bones.

The bones lying here and there rearranged themselves into a skeleton of a lion. The eldest intervened, "These belong to a lion, so avoid the temptation and let us be gone."

The third brother warned, "It's not worth the danger."

Unfortunately, the youngest could not resist the temptation. He chanted a second spell and the bones were covered with flesh and skin. But the lion was still dead. Seeing this the other brothers climbed the tree and pleaded, "Brother, please leave it at this. The lion will kill us all."

Yet the third mantra was said and the lion roared alive. And before its reviver, the youngest brother, could congratulate himself for his amazing feat, the lion sprang and killed him and dragged him into the forest.

This is just a story, but its message is that the other three brothers were also proficient in the knowledge of giving life, but they were wise enough not to use it over a lion. The youngest was foolish

and used his knowledge indiscriminately and invited his own death. If he had revived a dead man, at least the man would have been grateful for his entire life and served him well. Therefore, we must always be careful how and where we use our knowledge. Whatever we learn from our guru should always be used for good purposes.

- 101 *Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj*

CHINESE PILGRIMS TO INDIA

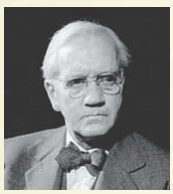
Hsüan-tsang

Two of the most important accounts about ancient India are by two Chinese Buddhist pilgrims. Fa-xian (337–c.422 CE), also known as Fa-hsien or Fa-hien, came to India around 400 CE and Xuanzang (602–664 CE), also known as Hsüan-tsang, came to North India in 629 CE. At the time of his visit, Fa-xian was impressed by the peace, prosperity and noble culture of the Hindus. At that time China was torn by internal wars. Fa-xian saw that the leaders in India fostered commerce, culture and religion rather than destroying large numbers of their population. He wrote that one could travel in India without fear of crime, and that the country was safe, stable and religious.

Xuanzang studied Sanskrit, logic, grammar and Buddhist philosophy at the Nalanda University in Magadha (Bihar), where about 3,000 Buddhist monks and 150 professors resided. Students from all parts of the world came there to study. The academic curriculum also included the Vedas, Vedic mathematics, astronomy, astrology, medical science and literature.

Hsüan-tsang wrote, "Though Indians are of a light temperament, they are distinguished by the straightforwardness and honesty of their character. With regard to riches, they never take anything unjustly; with regard to justice, they make even excessive concessions. Straightforwardness is the distinguishing feature of their administration" *(Müller, F. Max. India, What Can It Teach Us?).*

NATURE RETURNS SERVICE IN INTERESTING WAYS


Alexander Fleming

Winston Churchill

A farmer in Scotland by the name of Fleming, heard a voice calling for help. He immediately ran towards the call for help, and there he saw a boy neck-deep in quicksand. Fleming struggled and pulled the boy out of the quicksand, he affectionately patted him and told him to go home. Then, he returned to his farming job again.

Next day, a well-dressed gentleman visited the farmer and thanked him for saving the life of his son. He wished to reward the farmer. Fleming declined, saying he had only done his duty. Looking at a little boy, the gentleman asked Fleming if that was his son. Fleming nodded and was told, "This boy, one day will make you proud."

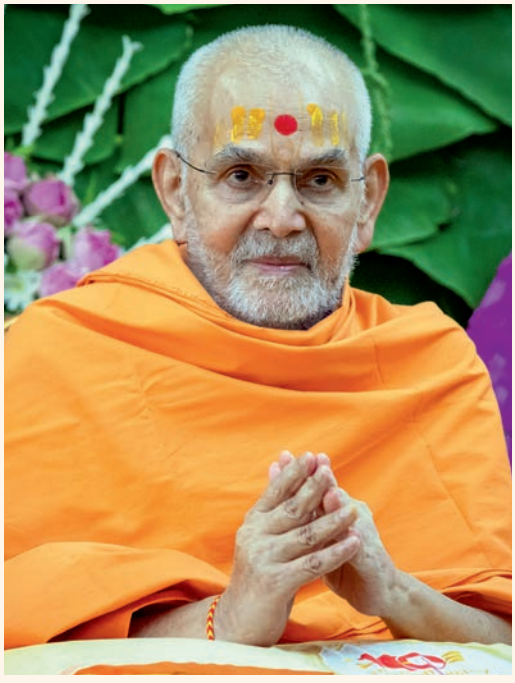
Then the gentleman took full responsibility for the upbringing and education of that boy. He grew up to become a world-renowned scientist. He was Alexander Fleming, who benefited humanity by his invention of penicillin. A few months after this invention, the son of that gentleman was hit by a severe attack of pneumonia! You know how his life was saved (for the second time)? With penicillin! He was Winston Churchill.

So, it is true that what goes around, comes around. Nature doesn't retain anything. It returns everything with interest. ◆

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

18 April to 1 June 2022, Kanad, Surat

From 24 February to 1 June 2022, Swamishri stayed at the BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham site in Kanad, Surat, and gave the benefit of his darshan, spiritual discourses and participation in various celebrations to countless devotees and well-wishers of Surat and South Gujarat. They were also blessed by Swamishri's morning puja darshan and evening *samip* (close) darshans. Swamishri also personally met aspirants to bless them and resolve their personal problems. During his discourses Swamishri elaborated upon Yogiji Maharaj's teachings in *Yogi Vani, Pramukh Sneh Sudha* and Satsang Diksha.



Despite the scorching summer heat countless devotees pilgrimaged to Kanad by foot, observed fasts and performed physical *seva* to please Swamishri. The tribal devotees of South Gujarat performed traditional dances and offered devotion to Swamishri. At 88 years, Swamishri gave satsang *labh* (benefit) to all for over three months in Kanad.

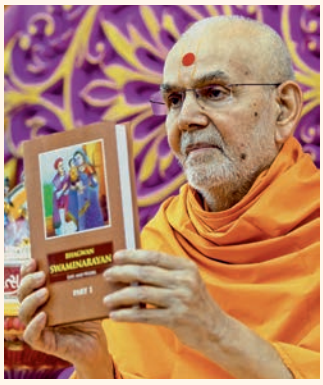
In the previous, May–June 2022, issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss,* Swamishri's *vicharan* was reported till 17 April. We continue with a brief report of his *vicharan* from 18 April to 1 June 2022.

APRIL: KANAD (SURAT)

- **19:** Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Kunvara (Mehsana district).
- **21:** With the inspiration of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj a students' hostel was inaugurated in Surat in 2008. Recently, a newly built BAPS Vidyamandir school was completed on the hostel campus. On 21 April 2022, Mahant Swami Maharaj declared the school open by igniting an inaugural lamp.
- **22:** Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Aerthan (Surat rural region).
- **23:** Swamishri ignited a lamp to inaugurate the inception of *satsang sabhas* for well-wishers (*sad-bhavis*).
- **28:** Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Oon (Sankari region).
- **29:** Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Kapasi (Surat rural region). After his morning puja, Swamishri inaugurated an English translation: *Bhagwan Swaminarayan,* Part 1, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

MAY: KANAD (SURAT)

- 3: Today was Akha Trij, which marked the beginning of the month-long *chandan* decorations of the *panchadhatu murtis* in BAPS mandirs. Swamishri's Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were also adorned with *chandan*.
- 4: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Sotik (Kenya).
- 5: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and the Guru Parampara *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Ukai.
- 8: Swamishri launched the mammoth anti-addiction and environment care campaigns by kindling the inaugural lamp. The campaigns were scheduled to be carried out from 8 to 22 May by 30,000 BAPS children in Gujarat and other states.
- 11: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Shiyavada and Vadodara (canvas *murtis* of the Guru Parampara) in the Ahmedabad rural region. Today, Mahant Swami Maharaj's 61st *bhagwati diksha* anniversary was celebrated with devotion and joy.



Swamishri inaugurates an English print publication: 'Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Life & Work' Part 1

- 14: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Sangli (Maharashtra) and the Guru Parampara *murtis* for the *hari* mandir in Fali (Sankari region).
- 20: Swamishri travelled from Kanad to the BAPS mandir in Adajan, Surat, for darshan. Devotees gave him a warm welcome and after blessing them Swamishri returned to Kanad.
- 21: Today marked the 72nd Pramukh Varni Din celebration of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri celebrated the occasion with devotion and joy.
- 29: Swamishri inaugurated the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute in London by igniting a lamp.
- 30: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Kanad and also inaugurated the *Shatabdi Prasang Mukhpath* booklet. ◆

Translation by Sadhu Vivekjivandas from a concise Gujarati report by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas

Swamishri launches the children's anti-addiction campaign

Swamishri inaugurates the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, UK & Europe, by igniting an inaugural lamp in Surat

Mahant Swami Maharaj Blesses Satsang Assemblies

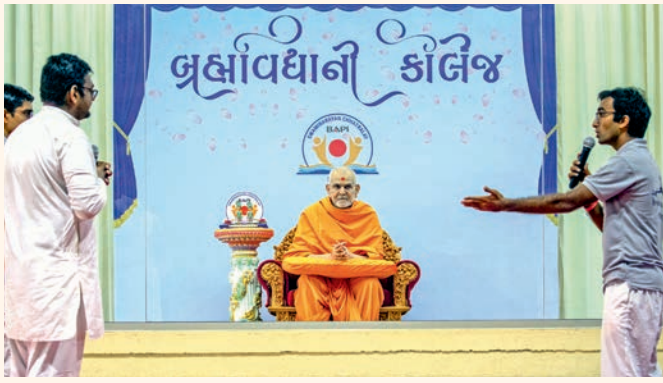
April–May 2022, Surat

APRIL

- 15: An evening satsang assembly was arranged at Kanad for members of the textile industry. An introduction to BAPS and its various activities were presented. Thereafter, brief information about the textile industry was given, which was followed by an inspiring speech by a swami. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "May the textile industry progress further and all become successful. Make progress in your business by adhering to moral values."
- 17: The evening Sunday satsang assembly was themed on ' Mahant Swami Maharaj: An Ocean of Virtues'. Several swamis discoursed about Mahant Swami Maharaj's virtues of devotion to God and his gurus, humility, selfless love, equanimity, compassion and others.
  In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami are the roots of all virtues. By enshrining them within ourselves, all virtues will flow in us. All our gurus possessed the virtues of God. If one is passionate about pleasing Maharaj and Swami, one will be blessed with all virtues. One who has unshakeable faith and firm trust that God is the all-doer will become a recipient of all virtues. One must be aware while offering bhajan and bhakti that no one is greater than God."
- 30: Today's assembly programmes were presented by the alumni of BAPS Chhatralaya, Surat. They enacted skits and narrated incidents themed on the life-inspirations they gained during their stay in the *chhatralaya.* In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

MAY

- 1: Today's Sunday evening assembly was



Chhatralaya youths present a skit before Swamishri

celebrated as Youth Day. It was themed on 'Youth Assembly – A Source of Character'. Anirdesh Swami talked about 'Satpurush as the Inspirer of Values'. Thereafter, several incidents were narrated about the transformations effected through the daily youth assemblies. Finally, Swamishri blessed the special assembly.

- 8: Today's Sunday satsang assembly was themed on Mahant Swami Maharaj's life and work. Several swamis discoursed about Swamishri's immense efforts and hardships in spreading satsang and his relentless *vicharan* to please the devotees. Several aspects of his life were also presented through videos. The assembly concluded with Swamishri's blessings.
- 15: 'Mahasangram' (Great Battle) was the theme of today's Children's Day Sunday evening programme. Kids and children's activity volunteers presented speeches and dramas depicting how to overcome the distractions of TV, mobiles and video games. In conclusion, Swamishri inspired the children to remain firm in satsang practices.

Swamishri blesses youths during the Youth Day evening assembly

A skit presentation by children and *bal karyakars* during the Children's Day assembly

- **22:** Today's festive Sunday satsang assembly paid tributes to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Year celebrations. In the beginning, Atmaswarup Swami narrated the unique saintly qualities of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, Swamishri's arrival was marked by a colourful procession. A colourful chariot with the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was pulled by youths on the central pathway of the large assembly ground. It was followed by Swamishri's decorated car. Thousands of devotees welcomed and honoured Swamishri with chantings of *jais*. Teenagers and youths welcomed the gurus with flower petals and performed a pulsating devotional welcome dance on the performing stage.

  Swamishri performed the *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, and finally blessed the satsang assembly.
- **27:** Today marked the 130th birthday celebration of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj. After Swamishri's morning puja, many infants were initiated into Satsang in his presence.

  In the evening celebration assembly, Ghanshyamcharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami narrated inspiring incidents about Yogiji Maharaj. Thereafter, Swamishri spoke about Yogiji Maharaj. Then, Swamishri was honoured with flower garlands and decorative shawls by swamis. Swamishri also inaugurated two Swaminarayan Aksharpith publications: Satsang Diksha in Portuguese language and an illustrated book on the life of Bhagatji Maharaj published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.
- **28:** A special assembly was held on the mandir grounds to felicitate farmers who had offered their lands for the Akshardham mandir project in Kanad. Swamishri gave darshan and blessed them with happiness and progress in life.
- **29:** After residing at the Kanad Akshardham mandir site for over three months, Swamishri attended his final Sunday satsang assembly. The assembly highlighted outstanding memories that Swamishri had given to all during his stay. Swamis, youths and volunteers delivered speeches and a video highlighted the memorable events of Swamishri's stay. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the mammoth assembly.
- **1 June 2022:** In the evening, Swamishri departed from Surat and headed towards Ahmedabad. ◆

Translation by Sadhu Vivekjivandas from a concise Gujarati report by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas

Swamishri observes a decorative artwork of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

Mahant Swami Maharaj in Ahmedabad

1–14 June 2022

Grand welcome assembly of Swamishri, Ahmedabad

On 1 June 2022, Mahant Swami Maharaj departed from Surat and arrived at the BAPS mandir in Ahmedabad. A warm welcome was given to Swamishri by the swamis and devotees. Every morning, devotees from different suburbs came for Swamishri's puja darshan. Prior to the daily puja darshan a discourse was delivered by a swami. In the evenings, from 6.00–8.00 p.m., devotees from different suburbs came for Swamishri's *samip* (close) darshan in the Yagnapurush Sabhagruh. First, a discourse was delivered by a swami. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *arti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and blessed the prayers of devotees written on paper slips. Swamishri would take out one paper slip and read a devotee's prayer.

Every Sunday evening special satsang assemblies were held. Highlights of some assemblies are as follows.

■ GRAND WELCOME ASSEMBLY
1 June 2022

During late afternoon, thousands of devotees had assembled in the Yagnapurush Sabhagruh (assembly hall) in the Ahmedabad mandir. At 6.30 p.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived at the mandir from Surat. Children, teenagers and youths dressed in festive clothes welcomed Swamishri as he walked on the welcome pathway with jubilant *jais* and a shower of flower petals. A small group of *occhaviya* devotees sang bhajans in a traditional style. After doing Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri came to the Yagnapurush Sabhagruh and sat in a glass cabin. Thereafter, the hall came alive with a welcome bhajan, firework fountains, confetti and the waving of flags by thousands of devotees.

The main ritual of welcoming Swamishri began with the offerings of sixteen auspicious items (*shodshopchar*). Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami applied a *chandlo* of *chandan* on Swamishri's forehead. Swamishri also applied a *chandlo* of *chandan* on Ishwarcharan Swami's forehead and blessed him. Thereafter, senior swamis offered a garland, sweets, upper cloth, *arti* and other items. Simultaneously, children, teenagers, youths and satsang volunteers offered the same items from a lower stage. The entire welcome ritual inspired devotional sentiments and a joyful ambience.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly and said that we were all fortunate to have the divine association of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his

Swamishri meditates in his daily puja

A skit presentation by youths and devotees

presence on earth through the Gunatit gurus. He added that this would never have happened without the abundant grace and compassion of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

■ PRAMUKH VARNI DIN
3 June 2022 (Jeth *sud* 4)

Today, marked the 72nd Pramukh Varni Din of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. On this day, Shastriji Maharaj had appointed 28-year-old Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the president of BAPS. Every year, thousands of devotees in Ahmedabad pilgrimage for darshan and to offer prayers at the historic Ambli Vali Pol (also Yagnapurush Pol).

To celebrate this occasion, a variety of mangoes were arranged as an offering before Thakorji in the main mandir and in Swamishri's morning puja. The unique darshan enthused thousands of devotees during the puja darshan. The mangoes were later distributed as *prasad* to the devotees.

The evening celebration assembly was themed on 'Pramukh Varni Panchamrut'. After *dhun* and bhajans by the youths, Viveksagar Swami discoursed on the history and importance of Pramukh Varni Din. After Swamishri's arrival, former students of BAPS *chhatralayas* performed a drama written by Adarshjivan Swami. Incidents about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's virtues of service, sacrifice, love, divine personality and pledge were presented through speeches, videos and dialogues. Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami narrated incidents of Shastriji Maharaj's love for Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In conclusion, Swamishri praised the virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "Swami Bapa followed the pledge he took on Pramukh Varni Din till his last breath. Oh, how much efforts he made! He visited and sanctified countless homes and pleased the devotees. He endeavoured in all the domains of the Satsang fellowship. He has left nothing for me to do. He nurtured swamis and devotees who obey [my word] instantly. Thus, Swamishri has made everything conducive for me."

In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj, the present form of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, was honoured with decorative garlands and a shawl by senior sadhus. The entire congregation experienced divine joy and spiritual elevation.

■ SUNDAY SATSANG ASSEMBLY
5 June 2022

Today's evening assembly theme was '*Ek Same Ahmedabad ma'* – 'One Time in Ahmedabad'. After the customary *dhun* and prayer, Atmaswarup Swami gave a discourse on Bhagwan Swaminarayan's and the guru *parampara's* contributions to the satsang in Ahmedabad. After Swamishri's arrival, an interesting drama

about the divine *labh* Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave to Ahmedabad was presented by youths and senior devotees. The drama outlined how Pramukh Swami Maharaj celebrated festivals in Ahmedabad and how he gave the benefit of his spiritual happiness to children, youths and the elderly devotees. The drama was interspersed with past video clips of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Ahmedabad. Youths gave testimonials about how Pramukh Swami Maharaj had blessed them with happiness and progress. Another landmark event that occurred in Ahmedabad was Pramukh Swami Maharaj's letter on 20 July 2012, declaring Mahant Swami Maharaj as his spiritual successor.

In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, "Yogiji Maharaj had re-established the *yuvak mandal* in Ahmedabad seventeen times. Every time that Yogiji Maharaj re-established the *yuvak mandal* he did so with the same joy and passion. Pramukh Swami Maharaj, too, had the same enthusiasm and gave his immeasurable spiritual joy to everyone here. Those who have experienced it can never forget it. Swami Bapa motivated everyone."

Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj recalled an incident of his with Yogiji Maharaj, "Outside the sanctum of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in the Ahmedabad mandir, Yogi Bapa called Pramukh Swami Maharaj and me and said, 'You both will run the Sanstha'. In this way, he gave the joy of his association and blessed us all with the attainment of Akshardham."

SANT SHIBIR
9–11 and 15–17 June 2022

Two *sant shibirs* were organized in Ahmedabad in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. The *shibir* theme was titled, 'Shandar Seva' – 'Grand Service'. *Sadguru* swamis and senior sadhus delivered inspiring speeches about how to offer *seva* during Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations. All swamis were blessed with Swamishri's personal blessings. ◆

Gujarati Report: Sadhu Brahmavatsal
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

(*Cont. from p. 15*)

Swamishri blessed, "I will pray to God. He will do good to all, since he is the supreme ruler. If we don't get the fruits of our efforts, then leave it to God and pray to him."

Mr Lamberty was impressed by Swamishri's reply. He had adopted three measures to shackle the demon of drugs: 1. To spread awareness about its terrible effects through TV broadcasts, 2. To have drug addicts treated by psychiatrists and 3. Through law and punishment. He said, "We have tried all the three measures, but you have shown us prayer as the fourth remedy. We have faith in prayers, and will indeed be successful."

Swamishri added, "All tasks are accomplished through prayers. Pray for the completion of good works and not for bad ones. By thinking ill of others, misery will befall us."

The secrets behind Swamishri's accomplishments in weaning people from addictions were prayers to God, selfless love and effort. ◆

Bhagatji Maharaj SMRUTI MANDIR

25–27 May 2022, Mahuva

In Surat, Mahant Swami Maharaj performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Bhagatji Maharaj's *murti* to be consecrated in the Smruti Mandir

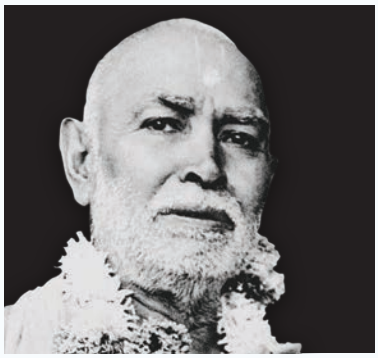
Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj (Pragji Bhakta) (1829–1897) was born in Mahuva on 20 March 1829. Mahuva is popularly known as the Kashmir of Saurashtra. Pragji Bhakta unflaggingly served Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh and through the latter's blessings he attained the God-realized state. All his life he spoke about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma. He gave up his mortal existence and reverted to Akshardham at 68 years of age, on 7 November 1897. Thereafter, his satsang legacy was continued by Shastriji Maharaj.

When Bhagatji Maharaj passed away Kothari Jetha Bhagat (later Nirgundas Swami) and Kothari Prabhudas were present. Bhagatji Maharaj's last rites were performed in a farm owned by his devoted friend, Fulchandbhai Khimji Sheth. Prior to that Fulchandbhai had expressed his wish, "Bhagatji Maharaj's cremation rites should be performed at such a place that it would be preserved in future." And his wish came true. Ever since, thousands of devotees have payed their respects at the small shrine by the River Malan in Mahuva.

In 1920, when Shastriji Maharaj came to Mahuva for darshan of the cremation spot he asked the owner of a neighbouring garden, "In future, a big shrine will be built here. Will you give some land for it?" The owner said yes and thus earned Shastriji Maharaj's blessings.

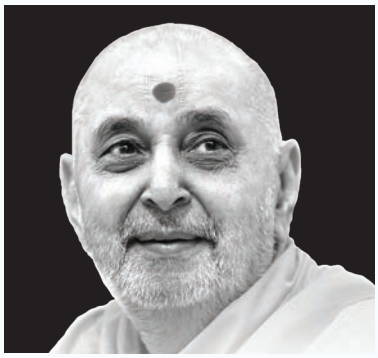
In 1951, after Shastriji Maharaj returned to Akshardham, Yogiji Maharaj had come for darshan at the cremation spot in Mahuva. He offered prostrations, chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun* and wished to make a beautiful shrine with a pair of marble *charanarvind* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan installed on it.

In 1956, Yogiji Maharaj stayed in



Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Mahuva for three days and gave the benefit of his spiritual association. In one of his discourses, Yogiji Maharaj prophesied, "In future, Mahuva will become a great place of pilgrimage. A big festival will be held and a pair of *charanavind* will be installed." Thereafter, through Yogiji Maharaj's inspiration, an official request was made to acquire the land surrounding the cremation spot. But it was rejected. Then, Bhagwanjibhai (the son of Narayanbhai – a nephew of Bhagatji Maharaj), Nagardas Vakil, Mohanbhai Mehta, Popatlal Dani and other devotees of Mahuva made untiring efforts to acquire the adjoining land, but without any success. Another request was made to the collector in Bhavnagar. At that time, Shri Jobanputra, who had deep respect for Yogiji Maharaj, was the collector of Bhavnagar. He thus assisted in acquiring the land.

In 1953 (on Bhadarva *sud* 15), with Yogiji Maharaj's blessings the foundation-stone laying ceremony for a small shrine was performed by *bhaktraj* Ishwarbhai Prabhudas. Then, four years later, on 3 June 1957, Yogiji Maharaj performed the ritual installation of a replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *charanarvind* on the shrine. Thereafter, a memorable *pratishtha* assembly was held in which a letter written 40 years previously by Shastriji Maharaj to Mansukhbhai Mistry was read. Shastriji Maharaj had written asking Mansukhbhai for Rs. 3,000 to build a memorial shrine. Subsequently, due to Shastriji Maharaj's wish a small shrine was built on the cremation spot and Bhagatji Maharaj's glory was greatly heightened. In Mahuva village, the local people popularly addressed Bhagatji Maharaj as Praga Prabhu.

On 9 April 1962, Yogiji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* ritual of a small mandir on the cremation spot of Bhagatji Maharaj and said, "This place of Bhagatji Maharaj is like Akshardham." Since 1971, after Yogiji Maharaj gave up his mortal existence, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited Mahuva thirty-two times and increased its glory manifold times. From 10 to 13 March 1979, Pramukh Swami Maharaj stayed in Mahuva for three days and festively celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Bhagatji Maharaj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj made great efforts in developing the birthplace of Bhagatji Maharaj, which climaxed with the construction of a *shikharbaddha* mandir on the outskirts of Mahuva. Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* for the mandir in 2014 and created history.

To fulfil the wishes of gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj decided to construct an ornate memorial (*smruti*) mandir on the cremation spot of Bhagatji Maharaj. To make this project possible more land was required. However, the acquisition of land was a difficult and challenging task. Despite all odds, by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings, the required land was acquired. A little more land was required behind the proposed Smruti Mandir, which belonged to Shri Haribhai Keshavbhai Senta. He sold the required land to BAPS. Thereafter, the

Smruti Mandir construction work commenced. When Haribhai attended the three-day *pratishtha* event of the Smruti Mandir he heard about the sacrifice of the devotees and also did darshan of the sadhus. He was thus overwhelmed and declared, "Though I have taken a price for my land I now wish to donate it to the BAPS." Then, Shri Haribhai, his sons Tilak and Hiren, donated a cheque to the BAPS of the same amount he had taken on selling the land.

The efforts for acquiring five acres of land for the Smruti Mandir were made by Kothari Adhyatmaswarup Swami (Gadhada), Bhaktitanay Swami (Mahuva), Bipinbhai Sanghvi and other devotees. Thereafter, in 2013, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami drew a rough sketch plan of the Smruti Mandir. Architects prepared a proper plan of the mandir in accordance with his guidelines. In 2015, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *pujan* rituals of the foundation *shilas*. In the same year, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami performed the *shilanyas* rituals of the Smruti Mandir. The construction work with pinkstone from Bansipahdhpur in Rajasthan was started according to the mandir plans by Akshaymuni Swami, Nirmalmuni Swami and Sanjay Parikh of the BAPS central planning and construction department. Chetanbhai Balkrishnabhai Trivedi also contributed his services as a *sthapati* (traditional architect). Kothari Vinamrayogi Swami and swamis of Mahuva mandir offered their services during the construction work.

On 10 October 2018, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited Mahuva and performed the *pujan* ritual of the *amalsaro* (round stone on the *shikhar*). In this way the mandir was constructed in the Nagaradi style through the concerted efforts of swamis, devotees and experts. The Smruti Mandir is 143 ft long, 101 ft wide and 46 ft high. It comprises 60 ornately carved pillars, 300 carved *murtis*, 35 ornate ceilings, 25 carved *jharukhas* (windows) and 54 *torans* (arches). The Smruti Mandir has a beautifully carved *mandovar* (outer wall) and intricately carved *samrans*. The main dome has a grand, ornate *samran* surrounded by 15 beautiful *samrans*. The mandir has three different entrances that lead to the main sanctum. In the mandir *garbhagruh* (sanctum sanctorum), are installed the marble *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami and Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj.

Beneath the central dome lies a raised round marble platform (*oto*) on which are installed the *charanarvind* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the *asthi* (sacred ashes) of Bhagatji Maharaj. The Smruti Mandir complex includes beautiful gardens and lawns, bookstore, Premvati snack shop, children's playground, an exhibition on Bhagatji Maharaj's life, welcome centre and a pujari's residence.

The aesthetic Smruti Mandir has become possible through the wish and dream of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj and the guidance of Ishwarcharan Swami.

The Smruti Mandir was consecrated with the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj. The highlights of the three-day *murti*-installation *mahotsav* are as follows.

SMRUTI MANDIR MAHOTSAV
25–27 May 2022, Mahuva

■ INTRODUCTION

Bhagwan Swaminarayan had consecrated Mahuva during his visit as Nilkanth Varni. The town was further sanctified with the birth of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, the second spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the BAPS guru tradition.

With Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish the memorial mandir of Bhagatji Maharaj was constructed with the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj. On 8 April 2022, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Bhagatji Maharaj in Kanad, Surat. The devotees of Mahuva, Rajula and Una regions attended the occasion and were blessed by Mahant

(*Top left, clockwise*) Intricately carved inside part of main dome; carved ceiling; ornate *mandover* and inside of the Smruti Mandir with an *oto* and the *garbhagruha* in the background

Swami Maharaj. The *murtis* were thereafter daily worshipped and offered *thal* for one month at the *shikharbaddha* BAPS Mandir in Mahuva.

On 27 May 2022, the *murtis* were ritually installed in the Smruti Mandir by Dr Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami. As part of the *pratishtha*, a three-day festive programme was held from 25 to 27 May. The volunteer devotees of Mahuva had personally delivered 8,000 invitations to well-wishers and devotees.

On 24 May, the Mahuva municipality payed tributes to Bhagatji Maharaj by naming a town square in Mahuva as 'Bhagatji Maharaj Chowk'. The foundation for a gate, Akshar Dwar, on Pramukh Swami Marg was performed in the presence of the chairman and vice-chairman of the town municipality. On 25 May, Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami performed the *mahapuja* rituals at the newly renovated birthplace of Bhagatji Maharaj.

■ WOMEN'S CONVENTION: 25 MAY

The afternoon women's convention was themed on 'Single Goal of Spiritual Sacrifice', in which *balikas, yuvatis* and *mahilas* presented a cultural programme. The convention was graced by local women dignitaries. In memory of Bhagatji Maharaj, *prasad* of *churmu* was given to all the attendees. Over 1,100 women devotees and well-wishers attended the convention.

■ GRAND RELIGIOUS ASSEMBLY: 25 MAY

On the evening of 25 May, a grand assembly of Hindu religious leaders and a felicitation programme of all who had assisted in creating

the Smruti Mandir was held. The religious leaders and socially prominent persons who graced the special assembly were Pujya Vijay Bapu (Mahant of Satadhar seat), Pujya Amardas Bapu (Mahant of Kankach seat), Pujya Rajendradas Bapu (Mahant of Ram Paas Raho place), Pujya Govind Swami (Swaminarayan Gurukul, Mahuva), Shri Bipinbhai Sanghvi (Chairman of Nagrik Bank), Shri Narayanbhai Kachhadiya (MP, Amreli), Shri Rameshbhai Makwana (MLA, Mahuva), Shri Ghanshyambhai Patel (Chairperson of APMC) and Shri Kanubhai Kalsariya (Director of Sadbhavana Hospital). The women dignitaries present were Bhavnaben Makwana (former MLA), Pushpaben Thakar (Chairperson of Mahila Cooperative Bank) and Gitaben (Chairman of the town municipality).

On this occasion, Dr Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the special assembly. Kothari Adhyatmaswarup Swami (Gadhada) honoured the stage guests and briefly narrated the story of how the Smruti Mandir was constructed and appreciated all those who had helped and offered their services. Then, Govind Swami of the Swaminarayan Gurukul shared his memorable experiences with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Mahant Vijay Bapu of the Satadhar seat said, "Bhagatji Maharaj offered pure bhakti (to his guru). Shastriji Maharaj accepted Bhagatji Maharaj as his guru because there was something special about him."

Children and youths performed a traditional dance to honour the Smruti Mandir. Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about Bhagatji Maharaj and added, "In 1954 or 1955, Yogiji Maharaj came to Mahuva. Shri Haribhai, a leading businessman of Mahuva, often came for Yogiji Maharaj's darshan. Haribhai was between 85 and 90 years old and he narrated to Yogiji Maharaj that he had seen Pragji Bhakta when he was about ten years old. He remembered that the people of Mahuva called him Praga Prabhu because of his bhakti and *seva.* Everyone had love and respect for Bhagatji Maharaj.

"In the old mandir, Bhagatji Maharaj sat against a pillar and gave discourses. Yogiji Maharaj installed a pair of *charanarvind* on the spot where Bhagatji Maharaj was cremated. Many have experienced *samadhi* here and seen Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and Bhagatji Maharaj."

Dr Swami praised Bhagatji Maharaj's life, "Countless devotees in India and abroad celebrate the birthday of Bhagatji Maharaj. So, what was special about him? He had profound faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and that Gunatitanand Swami was Aksharbrahma. To spread their glory he remained fearless and unrelenting. He served all and never spoke ill of anyone. Therefore, we must take such inspiration from his life."

Over 6,000 devotees and well-wishers were present.

■ YAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE: 26 MAY

On the second day of the three-day festival, Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami commenced the *pratishtha yagna* and rituals for world peace at 5.30 a.m. After the chanting of Vedic mantras,Tyagvallabh Swami blessed the participants (*yajmans*), "We are all very honoured to participate in this *yagna*. We pray to Bhagatji Maharaj that we be blessed with the virtues of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti in our lives. May all be happy in body, mind and wealth and that there be happiness and peace everywhere."

The *yagnashala* was set up on the Smruti Mandir grounds. In all, 95 decorated *yagna kunds* were created and hundreds of devotees participated in the *yagna* rituals. Thereafter, an illustrated book published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith on the life of Bhagatji Maharaj in Gujarati and English was inaugurated and gifted to all the *yagna yajmans.*

■ NAGAR YATRA (PROCESSION): 26 MAY

The grand and colourful *nagar yatra* was flagged off at 4.30 p.m. It included:

- Bike riders
- Dance troupes

Pratishtha yagna held on the Smruti Mandir grounds. (*Bottom*) *Nagar yatra* of the *murtis* was carried out in Mahuva

- Devotees in large numbers
- Tribal (Dangi) dancers
- Horsemen
- Youths performing with belts
- Four horse-drawn carriages.
- Three chariots: Manki Rath with the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Sinh Rath with the *murtis* of Bhagatji Maharaj and Mayur Rath with the *murtis* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In addition, there were six chariots for swamis, decorated oxen carts, bhajan groups, anti-addiction exhibition and litter-free campaign floats. In the final part of the procession, women were carrying *kalashes* and *pothis* on their heads.

The one-kilometre long *nagar yatra* commenced from Parekh School and terminated at the Smruti Mandir. About 5,000 devotees and well-wishers took part in the procession. Many dignitaries welcomed the procession along its route.

■ SMRUTI-MANDIR PRATISHTHA: 27 MAY

The Smruti Mandir is nestled among coconut trees near the River Malan in Mahuva. Today, was the auspicious *murti*-installation day, which also coincided with the birthday celebration of Yogiji Maharaj according to the Indian calender – Vaishakh *vad* 12.

The installation ceremony was carried out on behalf of Mahant Swami Maharaj by Dr Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami. Shrutiprakash Swami recited shlokas for the Vedic *mahapuja* rituals for the installation of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Bhagatji Maharaj in a golden *sinhasan.* Thereafter, a pair of marble *charanarvind* and Bhagatji Maharaj's *asthi* in a pot were installed on the shrine (*oto*) located under the mandir dome.

(*Top left, clockwise*) Dr Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami perform the *murti*-installation ceremony. Satsang assembly held after the *pratishtha* ceremony

At 9.30 a.m., after the *murti*-installation rituals were over, an assembly was held in a marquee adjacent to the Smruti Mandir. The assembly programme was as follows:

- *Dhun* and prayer by swamis.
- Video presentation about the divine experiences of and fulfillment of prayers by devotees related to the holy shrine.
- Discourses by Atmaswarup Swami and Bhaktitanay Swami (who lives in Mahuva mandir).
- MLA Shri R.C. Makwana spoke about the glory of Bhagatji Maharaj and the difficulties he tolerated. He also expressed that as citizens of Mahuva they were all fortunate to have been born on the holy land where Bhagatji Maharaj was born.
- Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami said in his address, "Bhagatji Maharaj is always present here and is giving darshan to all. The cremation spot is divine and miraculous. Yogiji Maharaj had blessed that whoever performs *dandvats* and says *malas,* prays and makes wishes at this place then Bhagatji Maharaj would fulfil them."
- Children and youths performed a devotional dance as a tribute to Bhagatji Maharaj.
- Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami spoke about how Bhagatji Maharaj served to please Gunatitanand Swami. He said, "Bhagatji Maharaj daily performed 23 hours *seva* and listened to *katha*. He propagated that Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar and Sahajanand Swami is the supreme Bhagwan. Shastriji Maharaj, though a great scholar and very bold, realized the glory of Bhagatji Maharaj and accepted him as his guru. Today, Bhagatji Maharaj is present through Mahant Swami Maharaj."
- Video blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj were shown. He said, "Jai Swaminarayan to all. Today is Bhagatji Maharaj's Smruti Mandir *pratishtha* festival. Bhagatji Maharaj truly pleased

Newly built birthplace of Bhagatji Maharaj and his holy *murti* installed on the birth spot

Gunatitanand Swami. Bhagatji Maharaj was the embodiment of Aksharbrahma, yet he became like us and lived on earth. All his actions seemed to be like ours, but he was a God-realized Sant and left lots of inspirations for us. With great courage he propagated the glory of Aksharbrahma to all. He was severely insulted, excommunicated from Satsang, given poison, yet he did not fall back in propagating Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma.

"Shastriji Maharaj truly realized Bhagatji Maharaj. Due to his wish this Smruti Mandir has been made and it is a divine miraculous place. I wished to come for the *pratishtha* but due to the present circumstances I could not attend. Therefore, all of you be happy and pleased. I pray to Maharaj, Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj that all swamis and devotees attain the spiritual state of Bhagatji Maharaj. May all of you who have offered *seva* for the Smruti Mandir attain *moksha*. I pray that any devotee who makes a good wish with faith is fulfilled."

- In conclusion, Dr Swami addressed the assembly, "Though Bhagatji Maharaj was of an ordinary background, his glory has spread throughout the world. In spite of the challenges he faced he respected and served everyone. May we be able to please Mahant Swami Maharaj in the way that Bhagatji Maharaj pleased Gunatitanand Swami."

- Finally, the swamis and devotees who had offered their services for the Smruti Mandir and the festival were honoured by the *sadguru* swamis. In conclusion, Kothari Vinamramuni Swami gave the vote of thanks.

SEVA AND BHAKTI

To celebrate the Smruti Mandir *pratishtha* festival many male and female devotees of Mahuva had performed austerities, and reading (*paath*) of Satsang Diksha, Sahajanand Namavali and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's biography.

As part of the three-day festival, members of the BAPS *bal mandal* carried out an anti-addiction campaign for thirteen days (11–23 May) in various parts of Mahuva and inspired many to give up addictions.

A three-day medical camp was carried out during the *pratishtha* festival with the help of Hanumant Hospital and the urban health centre in Mahuva. More than 355 people benefited from the camp. A blood donation camp was also organized by the Sanstha during the three days.

About 750 volunteers from Mahuva, Una, Rajula, Bhavnagar and Dhari offered their services during the festival under the guidance of Kothari Vinamramuni Swami and other swamis. ◆

PARIVARIK SHANTI ABHIYAN

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's motto was 'In the joy of others, lies our own.' For him the world was his family – 'Vasudhaiva kutumbakam' – and during his 95 years on earth, he relentlessly endeavoured to promote family harmony throughout the world.

Thus, as part of his centenary celebrations, a 'Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan' (Family Harmony Campaign) was organized.

Men and women devotees at BAPS centres throughout India volunteered to participate in this project. These *shatabdi sevaks* were issued ID badges, provided relevant printed literature, including posters with Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspiring messages for family harmony, and videos to use during their visits to people's homes.

To log their visits, they were provided a mobile app – Pramukh Setu. Another mobile app – Prerna Setu – was made which they requested members of the families they visited to download and use for daily inspiration.

Before the nationwide Launch, a pilot project was carried out in centres of four cities and five villages from 10 to 17 November 2019, in which 150 *shatabdi sevaks* visited well-wisher families at their homes. After a successful test run, 18,000 *karyakars* were given project details during the Annual Karyakar Shibirs in December 2019.

The project was to last for four months, and each *shatabdi sevak* team would visit 300 families. In the cities, each team would comprise two *sevaks* and in the villages, each team would comprise four *sevaks.* Since everyone would be visiting families they had never met, training was essential.

Shatabdi sevaks visit homes to convey Pramukh Swami Maharaj's messages for family harmony

Over 72,800 men and women devotees had volunteered to serve as *shatabdi sevaks.* So, first a guide booklet was prepared. Then 290 trainers, including sadhus, and men and women voluteers, were trained. During January 2020, these trainers conducted 304 training sessions to give detailed guidance to all the *shatabdi sevaks.*

With the training sessions completed the Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan launch assembly was held on 18 February 2020 in the presence of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj in Atladara. Swamishri's inspiring words further enthused all the *shatabdi sevaks.*

On the first day of the campaign – 1 March 2020 – Swamishri was in Anand, where he lit the inaugural *divo* for the project. Thousands of *shatabdi sevaks* in the villages, towns and cities began visiting homes and speaking to families about ways to enhance their family unity and harmony.

The *shatabdi sevaks* encouraged the families they visited to undertake one or more of the following options to strenghten their family harmony: (1) Conduct a regular family assembly (*ghar sabha*), (2) Dine together once every day (*samuh bhojan*), and (3) Daily perform *arti* and prayers together.

At the end of each visit, the *shatabdi sevaks* chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun* for the continued peace, prosperity and happiness of the family.

The campaign proceeded as planned for 12 days, then the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and along with the worldwide lockdowns, this project was also discontinued.

Around 21 months later, on 31 December 2021, the project was re-started. But again, the surge in COVID-19 cases due to the omicron variant necessitated a temporary halt from 6 January 2022.

Then, on 31 January 2022, the campaign was again commenced, and continued for around 10 weeks.

The groups of *shatabdi sevaks* contacted around

Shatabdi sevaks visit homes to convey Pramukh Swami Maharaj's messages for family harmony

200 families, who wholeheartedly welcomed them into their homes, listened to their messages and also pledged to practise one or more of the observances.

FELICITATION ASSEMBLIES

After the conclusion of the Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan, special assemblies were held to felicitate the *shatabdi sevaks* for their outstanding efforts. So, on 24 April and 1 May 2022, BAPS centres arranged felicitation assemblies in the presence of local dignitaries, government officials and other distinguished members of society.

In each assembly, the efforts of the *shatabdi sevaks* was shown through videos and personal testimonies. The local and national statistics for the project and other inspiring information were also presented.

The guests at each centre appreciated the efforts of the volunteers and the beneficial impact of the campaign on society. Each assembly also featured video blessings from *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Highlights from some of the felicitation assemblies are presented below.

Surat

The felicitation assembly took place at Kanad, where the new mandir is being built, in the presence of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Among the guests was Surat family court judge, Shri Krishnakantsinh Rathod, who was touched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's seven messages for family harmony, and said, "Many family problems are presented in my court daily. If they adopt these seven principles, no family will ever have any in-fighting."

Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, "Gunatitanand Swami has said, 'By inspiring one person to practise satsang, one gets the merits of having liberated a *brahmand*.' You have all fulfilled his wish. You boldly went out to meet people and

Chief Minister Shri Bhupenrabhai Patel addresses the felicitation assembly in Ahmedabad

Invited dignitaries and swamis during the felicitation assembly in Ahmedabad

tolerated insults and other hardships. That is not an ordinary feat. You served in the Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan, to spread the inspiring messages of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This experience has moulded you and you have progressed spiritually. Shriji Maharaj said, 'One who tolerates insults is a sadhu.' So, you are all sadhus! Truly, congratulations to you all for your sincere efforts. You have earned the blessings of Maharaj, Swami and the guru *parampara.* Now with this strength, you must continue to talk to others about the inspiring and practical teachings of Maharaj, Swami and our satsang, whenever you get time."

PARIVARIK SHANTI ABHIYAN
In Figures

- Conducted in 17 states of India.
- 10,012 cities, town and villages visited.
- 72,806 men and women *shatabdi sevaks.*
- 7.2 million man-hours of voluntary service by *shatabdi sevaks.*
- 424,696 families pledged to conduct a regular *ghar sabha.*
- 1,028,375 families pledged to perform collective *arti* and prayers.
- 1,938,375 families pledged to take one meal together daily.
- 6,057,635 individuals inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's messages for family harmony.

Ahmedabad

Chief Minister Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj's personal touch and project management was such that we continue to learn from his ideals. You have all upheld those ideals."

Education minister of Gujarat, Shri Jitubhai Vaghani, said, "This is probably the first time that a large-scale family values project has been organized to commemorate someone's centenary."

Gujarat's Minister for Industry, Shri Jagdishbhai Panchal said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj was one of the top ten religious leaders of the world who touched millions of hearts."

Mehsana

General Secretary of BJP for Gujarat, Shri Rajvibhai Patel, said, "The world is living in the fast lane. Everyone is running, but few know where they are headed. So, this type of endeavour

Shatabdi sevaks seated in the felicitation assembly in Ahmedabad

is essential for the well-being of families, society and the nation."

Vadodara

Mayor of Vadodara, Shri Keyurbhai Rokadia, said, "The backbone of any person is their family. A harmonious family gives peace to all. You have helped to achieve this. Today, families are fracturing, which is a defect of society. But you have endeavoured to repair this defect. BAPS has actively promoted faith in God, respecting and serving parents, de-addiction and other messages of Pramukh Swami Maharaj for many years. By taking these messages personally to the families you have helped them to be happy and prosperous."

MLA Shri Jitubhai Sukhadia, said, "You have all discounted all distinctions of caste and community and with faith and devotion met families of all backgrounds to pass on these universal Hindu teachings. I congratulate you all for your dedication."

Rajkot

The felicitation assembly was held in the presence of Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriyadas Swami.

Gujarat State Cabinet Minister Shri Arvindbhai Raiyani said, "You have all done a great service for this nation."

MLA Shri Govindbhai Patel said, "BAPS has actively engaged in serving society for many years. This campaign will benefit the whole of Gujarat and the young generation especially. Your efforts will strengthen society and increase unity in families."

Collector Shri Arun Mahesh Babu said, "Your efforts have sent a strong message for family harmony, de-addiction and environmental care."

Bhavnagar

Collector Shri Yogeshbhai Nirgude said, "Everyone endeavours to increase harmony in their own family, but to reach out to others and to help increase the harmony in other families so that gradually everywhere there is harmony is a big message."

Editor of *Divya Bhaskar* Shri Tarakbhai Shah said, "The problems due to addictions and lack of family harmony are burning issues in today's society. The *sevaks* selflessly went house-to-house to spread these messages to create awareness in society."

Anand

Chief Whip of BJP Shri Pankajbhai Patel said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj is still amongst us. He is not far away. He himself did great work by visiting home-to-home and freeing people

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S SEVEN MESSAGES FOR FAMILY HARMONY

1. Family harmony naturally prevails if each member strives to become a better person.
2. Respect everyone, whatever their age. Speak kind and caring words only.
3. Nurture your children with a good education and noble values. This will secure them a better future.
4. In good and bad times, firm faith in God and prayer will ensure peace of mind.
5. Forgive and forget when family members make mistakes.
6. Mutually tolerate, compromise, adjust and sacrifice for family harmony.
7. Regular *ghar sabha* (family assembly), satsang and bhakti foster family unity, joy and rapport.

from addictions, and preserving Hindu traditions and culture among youths in India and abroad through mandirs."

The felicitation assembly was held in the presence of Pujya Dr Swami and other officials.

Jamnagar

City BJP President, Shri Vimalbhai Kargathra said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj may not be with us in person, but his messages are with us. If a person practises even one of these seven messages, their life will be transformed."

Amreli

Central government minister Shri Purushottambhai Rupala, said, "In the early days the *paramhansas* of Bhagwan Swamianrayan took these messages to the people in the villages. They suffered many hardships, but their efforts have yielded a great result. The need of today is to strengthen family harmony, which you have done through this campaign."

Limbdi

Gujarat State Cabinet Minister for Environment Shri Kiritsinh Rana said, "Only if family harmony and peace is maintained will our dharma be sustained."

In this way over 45 such felicitation assemblies were held throughout India to appreciate the dedication of the *shatabdi sevaks*. ◆

(*Cont. from p. 10*)

environmental, medical and other activities increased manifold. Yet, amid all this, he remained unburdened by it all and attributed everything to the grace of God and guru.

The present guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj, implicitly served Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He now helms the BAPS worldwide satsang and humanitarian activities.

Thus, through this uninterrupted 200-year-old Gunatit guru *parampara*, we see the true ideals of the guru-*shishya* relationship in its perfect form.

To conclude, the guru who guides the genuine spiritual aspirant on the path to God is a unique contribution of Sanatan Dharma to world spirituality. This many millennia-old guru-*shishya* system is so profound that it continues to flourish even today. ◆

BAPS Mandirs Celebrate International Yoga Day

19 & 21 June 2022

BAPS mandirs worldwide celebrated the International Day of Yoga by arranging public programmes. Some highlights:

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

Held in front of the iconic mandir, the event included a live yoga demonstration from three-time World Yoga Champion Ishwar Sharma, and a presentation of pranayama and meditation techniques from the Common Yoga Protocol (CYP) by Neil Patel, founder of Chi Kri Yoga.

The session was attended by Her Excellency Gaitri Issar Kumar, High Commissioner of India to the United Kingdom, as well as Lord Raminder Ranger CBE and Bob Blackman MP.

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nairobi (on 19 June)

Devotees helped and participated in the event organized by the Indian Commission on the grounds of the Premier Club in the presence of the High commissioner of India to Kenya, HE Shri Virander Paul. More than 2,500 adults and 1,500 children from all across Nairobi participated in this event and practised yoga. Other participating organizations included Hindu Swayam Sevak Sangh, Hindu Council of Kenya, South Indian Cultural Society, Yoga Kenya and Premier Club.

BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi (on 19 June)

Over 400 female devotees and guests from across the UAE celebrated this day based on the theme 'Yoga for Humanity' to promote health and wellbeing. The attendees were guided on the benefits of performing regular yoga and pranayam. Among the dignitaries present was HE Laila Rahhall El Atfani, Goodwill ambassador and founder/president of Business Gate. ◆

London, England

Nairobi, Kenya

Abu Dhabi, UAE

BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute Inaugurations, UK & Europe, USA, Canada

May–June 2022

Through the blessings and vision of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj and as a part of the celebrations marking the birth centenary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the 'BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute' chapters in UK & Europe, USA and Canada were inaugurated in the presence of esteemed guests from the world of academia, including Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami.

BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute Inauguration, London

Each inauguration was witnessed by thousands online and in-person at the respective mandirs.

Each inauguration assembly began with Vedic peace prayers.

Then, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj joined via a video link from India and inaugurated the institutes by lighting a traditional *divo*, with guests and others lighting their own *divo* at the mandir.

Addressing the assemblies, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "Yogiji Maharaj had envisioned such an institute and was passionate about youths learning and discoursing in Sanskrit. The Research Institute will fulfil this vision. May students excel in their studies and work together to serve society, expanding the circle of unity across the world."

Mahant Swami Maharaj then blessed the academics as well as representatives from various Hindu organizations who had gathered to celebrate the historic inauguration at each mandir.

Thereafter, Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami spoke, reinforcing Mahant Swami Maharaj's messages of global harmony, public service and academic excellence. He also urged parents to encourage their children to study the arts.

Subsequently, academics and other guests also addressed the assemblies.

Also, as part of each inauguration, hundreds of devotees participated in the three-hour 'Satsang Diksha Homatmak Path', a special ceremony in which offerings are made to a sacred flame with the recital of each verse from the Satsang Diksha shastra, in prayer for the new research institute.

Through its rigorous teaching of Sanskrit, classical Vedic literature and Hindu beliefs, values and practices – all in a traditional *gurukul* style – the institute will strive to foster social harmony, interfaith dialogue, public engagement and academic discourse as it generates opportunities for the highest level of value-based education, innovative research and creative expression.

SOME VENUE-SPECIFIC DETAILS

London, UK: 29 May 2022

The inauguration was held at the BAPS Mandir in London. Professor Hegarty, Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Religions at Cardiff University as well as Head of History, Archaeology and Religion, addressed the assembly, "The young people [who sang and recited in Sanskrit] are extraordinary! I cannot believe what I have seen and heard. I offer my deepest respect and thanks to His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj."

He added, "The new research centre will soon flourish here in the UK and Europe – and globally – under the sure and skilled guidance of the swamis assembled here today. Research and teaching based

on research, if they are themselves based on true and compassionate mastery, can make a difference in the world. The new research institute we inaugurate today will show that. I have no doubt at all."

As an example of the lofty ideals of the BAPS Swaminarayan tradition, Professor Hegarty cited a Sanskrit verse from the Satsang Diksha, authored by Mahant Swami Maharaj, praying for unity, friendship, compassion, tolerance and love to flourish among all people of the world.

BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute Inauguration, Robbinsville, USA

Toronto, ON, Canada: 4 June 2022

The BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute was inaugurated at the BAPS Swaminarayan Complex in Toronto, in the presence of representatives from more than 40 Hindu Mandirs and organizations.

Chief guest Hon. Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, shared, "The institute is dedicated to advancing education, advancing quality research, learning, reflection, and the democratization of wisdom. It is a key part of our country's future and access to Hindu culture. Its main objective is promoting universal harmony, and I can't think of a more amazing addition to our country as an institute about promoting universal harmony for everyone. I want to thank the leadership at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir for always bringing the community together; just as for this auspicious occasion, they have brought 40 Hindu Mandirs together from across the country – which is something that I have never seen before."

Hon. Candice Bergen, Leader of the Official Opposition, also sent a congratulatory message.

The Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education for the Province of Ontario, said, "The central vision of this institute is to bring light and togetherness at a time of great division in the world. We need more of this, and we applaud your leadership. We applaud the work of BAPS in Canada and around the world."

Pandit Roopnauth Sharma, President of the Hindu Federation, said, "I want to recognize the wonderful work BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha does here and worldwide to promote Sanatan Dharma. There is still hope for Hinduism when we have giants of our dharma like Bhadreshdas Swami present with us. Swamiji walks in the footsteps of Panini, Shankaracharya, and other great giants of Hindu philosophy."

Other special guests attending the historic inauguration included: The Hon. Kirsty Duncan, Member of Parliament for Etobicoke North; The Hon. Kinga Surma, Minister of Infrastructure for the Province of Ontario; Hardeep Grewal, MPP Elect for Brampton East; Deepak Anand, MPP for Mississauga–Malton.

Ottawa, ON, Canada: 11 June 2022

The BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute in Ottawa was launched in the presence of representatives from Hindu Mandirs and organizations. Special guests included: His Excellency Anshuman Gaur, Deputy High Commissioner of India to Canada; Chandra Arya, Member of Parliament for Nepean; Glen Gower, City Councillor for Stittsville.

Robbinsville, NJ, USA: 18 June 2022

The event took place at the site of Swaminarayan Akshardham North America, Robbinsville, New Jersey, in the presence of over 115 representatives from over 50 Hindu Mandirs and organizations, guests, and scholars. ◆

Seminars on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Contributions to Society

April–June 2022

Seminar on 'Krushi Maharshi: Pramukh Swami Maharaj', Anand

Seminar on 'Impetus in the Field of Education by Pramukh Swami Maharaj', Vallabh Vidyanagar

Under the auspices of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations, a series of seminars at universities in Gujarat were held in association with AARSH Research Institute, Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, to highlight the selfless and far-reaching contributions Pramukh Swami Maharaj made in healthcare, education, agriculture and other fields.

Each seminar featured a speech by BAPS swamis and by an academic of the respective institute on the topic of the seminar. Videos depicting the saintly life and selfless works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were also shown. In addition, other distinguished guests also spoke briefly on the topic. The seminars were broadcast live on the university's website and BAPS Sanstha's Prerna Setu mobile application.

Between April and June the following seminars have been conducted:

28 April 2022

At Shri Somnath Sanskrit University on the topic 'Nurture of Sanatan Culture and Traditions by Pramukh Swami Maharaj'.

Main speaker: Bhadreshdas Swami.

10 May 2022

At Bansilal Amritlal Krushi Mahavidyalaya, Anand Krushi University, Anand, on the topic 'Krushi Maharshi: Pramukh Swami Maharaj'.

Main speakers: Shrutiprakash Swami, Dr M.J. Patel, Bhagwatcharan Swami, Dr K.B. Kathiriya.

14 June 2022

At Sardarkrushinagar Dantiwada Krushi University, Sardarkrushinagar, on the topic 'Krushi Maharshi: Pramukh Swami Maharaj'.

Main speakers: Shrutiprakashdas Swami,Dr S.P. Pandya, Shri Ghanshyambhai Patel, former Finance Director of the Sardarkrushinagar Dantiwada Krushi University (via video), Dr P.K. Patel and Prof. R.M. Chauhan, Chancellor of Sardarkrushinagar Dantiwada Krushi University.

16 June 2022

At Charotar University of Science and Technology, on 'The Art of Understanding People from the Life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj'.

Main speakers: Apurvamunidas Swami, Dr B.G. Patel, Advisor at Charusat.

17 June 2022

At Charutar Vidyamandal University, Vallabh Vidyanagar: 'Impetus in the Field of Education by Pramukh Swami Maharaj'.

Main speakers: Anirdeshdas Swami, Shri Bhikhubhai B. Patel.

18 June 2022

At Charutar Arogya Mandal Bhaikaka University, Karamsad: 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's

Seminar on 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Contributions in the Field of Healthcare', Karamsad

Seminar on 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Contributions in the Field of Tribal Upliftment', Surat

Contributions in the Field of Healthcare'.

Main speakers: Vedmanandas Swami, Shri Jagrutbhai Bhatt, the Secretary of Charutar Arogya Mandal, and Dr Bhalendu Vaishnav, Professor and Head of the Department of Medicine of Bhaikaka University.

29 June 2022

At Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat: 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Contributions in the Field of Tribal Upliftment'.

Main speaker: Jnannayandas Swami. ◆

CHATURMAS NIYAMS

10 July to 4 November 2022

As instructed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri and by the wish of *guruhari* Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, devotees should undertake extra spiritual observances during the four holy months of Chaturmas. This year, Chaturmas is from 10 July 2022 (Ashadh *sud* 11) to 4 November 2022 (Kartak *sud* 11). To please Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, the following extra observances should be undertaken:

Reading

The following books should be read throughout the year:

1. Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj Jivan Charitra, Parts 5 & 6 in Gujarati (or listen to their audio on the Akshar Amrutam app)
2. Mahant Swami Maharaj: An Epitome of Saintliness
3. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Bhaktaratno, Parts 3 & 4 in Gujarati (or listen to their audio on the Akshar Amrutam app)
4. Daily read the Vachanamrut & Swamini Vato

Austerities

- In view of the prevailing pandemic, observe austerities that will help to sustain good immunity. Or observe *ektana* during the month of Shravan.

Listening

- Daily listen to 7–10 minutes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspiring incidents and blessings.

Darshan

- Video darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 7–10 minutes daily to commemorate his Centenary Celebrations (1921–2021).

Devotion

- Daily turn an extra five or more *malas*. Perform extra *dandvats*, *pradakshinas*, etc. as per one's capacity.
- Inspire one friend to join *satsang*, such that they daily apply *tilak-chandlo* and perform daily puja.
- Contemplate for five minutes every day on the *mahima* of Swamishri – his virtues, work and divine form.

Homage to Guru

- Every week, narrate in person or via letter, email or social media, one incident highlighting the virtues of Swamishri to as many relatives and friends as possible.

Family

- Conduct *ghar sabha*: In commemoration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary, gather your family to read about, listen to, have darshan of and contemplate on our guru.
- For one year invite the same one family to your *ghar sabha* once a month.
- Inspire one family to start conducting their own *ghar sabha*.

Note: During Chaturmas, devotees should not eat brinjals, white and red radish, sugarcane or *mogri*.

BAPS Invited to the European Union-Bahrain Conference on 'Freedom of Religion and Belief'

1 June 2022, Bahrain

Representing BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Brahmaviharidas Swami was personally received by HE Dr Sheikh Khalid Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa (Chairman of the Board of Trustees of King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence) at the European-Bahrain Conference on 'Broadening the Tent: Freedom of Religion and Belief' at the Gulf Convention Centre in Bahrain.

This was an international conference to discuss current affairs and global challenges faced by different faiths across Europe and worldwide. It also focused upon peaceful coexistence and the way forward. Ambassadors and representatives of all 27 EU countries and 6 GCC countries, as well as scholars and faith leaders participated in presentations, discussions and interactive sessions.

Under the Royal Patronage of His Majesty King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa of The Kingdom of Bahrain, The King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence won global accolades for organizing this first-ever conference between the European Union and Bahrain, which will serve as a key driver for religious harmony across Europe and the Gulf region.

On behalf of BAPS, Brahmaviharidas Swami addressed the dignitaries and delegates at the conference on the ideas of religion, humanity and harmony. He spoke of celebrating not just the similarities, but also the dissimilarities between different faiths and religions. The Hindu ideal of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – The Whole World is One Family' inspires us to accept and respect each other despite our differences. He emphasized that just as love helps us humans connect and coexist with birds and animals despite our physical and existential differences, true spiritual love, as revealed by enlightened spiritual leaders like HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj and HH Mahant Swami Maharaj, help us transcend our differences to coexist in harmony. God has created this world not so that we perish in disharmony, but so that we flourish in harmony. This message of universal love and global harmony was greatly appreciated by all, especially by HE Dr Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa and also by the Chairperson of 'This is Bahrain Society' Ms Betsy Mathieson, who remarked, "Swamiji's lecture was a game changer. He gave a completely new perspective. Before his speech, delegates were focused on intellectual commonalities and now the focus has shifted to an inspirational human element, and heart to heart connectivity."

Both the Chairman and the Secretary-General of King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence personally guided Brahmaviharidas

Swami and the BAPS delegation, which included Dr Praful Vaidya, Ramesh Patidar and community leaders, through the 'This is Bahrain' exhibition that displayed the values of harmony and peaceful coexistence in Bahrain.

On behalf of BAPS, Brahmaviharidas Swami thanked the Chairman and the organizers for holding this path-breaking conference and appreciated the generosity, inclusivity and hospitality extended by the officials and the royal leadership of Bahrain. ◆

HRH Crown Prince & PM of Bahrain Receives BAPS Delegation

31 May 2022, Bahrain

His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, welcomed Brahmaviharidas Swami and a delegation of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

At the meeting, HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister discussed the construction of a BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Temple in Bahrain on land gifted by the leadership of Bahrain, as announced by him on 1 February 2022 and as welcomed by the Hon. Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi.

Also present at the meeting were Indian Ambassador Piyush Srivastava, BAPS Bahrain President Dr Praful Vaidya, and community leaders Mr Ramesh Patidar and Mr Mahesh Devji. Senior Cabinet members, including Deputy Prime Minister HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Minister of Finance and National Economy HE Sheikh Salman bin Khalifa Al Khalifa and Director General of PM Office and Cabinet Secretary HE Hamad bin Faisal Al Malik were also in attendance.

During the meeting, Brahmaviharidas Swami delivered a message from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister welcoming this historic moment. He also conveyed the blessings and good wishes of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The fruition of a long-cherished dream, the Swaminarayan Temple in Bahrain will represent the timeless values of Hinduism and the vision of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa for an inclusive world that will nurture peace and interfaith harmony.

The Bahrain temple will also welcome people of all faiths who may wish to know and understand Indian traditions and have the space for various cultural and spiritual activities.

Speaking on the occasion of receiving the grant of land formally from HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Bahrain, Brahmaviharidas Swami said, "We are profoundly grateful to the Crown Prince & Prime Minister of Bahrain and to the Prime Minister of India for this historic gift of land which represents the enriching of warm relations and an exchange of ideas between Bahrain and India which spans millennia. For BAPS, it is the culmination of a precious moment in 1997 when the late Emir Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa received His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the Royal Palace in Bahrain. In their conversation, Sheikh Isa lovingly and

instantaneously told Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 'Make Bahrain your home.'

"It was a sentiment that was echoed by HRH the Crown Prince & Prime Minister in 2017 when he visited our Diwali gathering. Upon seeing the picture of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and late Emir Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, he said, 'Our love extends to three generations. We will honour the words and sentiments of our grandfather.' The building of this BAPS Swaminarayan Temple marks a seminal and historic moment for Hinduism, for relations between India and Bahrain, and for international harmony as a whole."

In conclusion, Brahmaviharidas Swami thanked the leadership for their generosity, Shri Narendra Modi for his integrity and assured that the temple and the surrounding cultural and spiritual complex shall strengthen universal understanding and interfaith harmony, and will also nurture the children of today and coming generations towards a brighter future. ◆

First Historic Interfaith Conference

11 May 2022, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

During the year of the Centenary Celebrations of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj and in memory of his historic address at the UN Millennium Peace Summit (in August 2000), BAPS took part in the Forum on Common Values Among Religious Followers. The Forum was organized by the Muslim World League, an Islamic NGO based in Makkah that aims, amongst other things, to extend bridges of dialogue and cooperation with all. The Muslim World League invited Brahmaviharidas Swami to represent the Hindu faith as a part of its historic inclusion of Jewish and non-Abrahamic faith leaders.

A select 90 delegates from 35 countries which included spiritual leaders of eminence attended the inaugural forum. Brahmaviharidas Swami was joined by Swami Avdheshanand Giriji Maharaj as the two speakers representing Hinduism. Other delegates included United States Ambassadors-at-large for Religious Freedoms, leaders of the Roman Catholic, Coptic and Eastern Orthodox churches, Chief Rabbis from Europe and North America, Buddhist leaders from South Asia and Islamic leaders from across the globe including the Grand Mufti of Egypt.

The event was chaired by the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, His Excellency Sheikh Dr Mohammed Bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa. Dr Al-Issa proclaimed, "We are pleased to launch the Forum on Common Values Among Religious Followers in Riyadh. We hope the conference will

result in dialogue and practical initiatives that will bring followers of all faiths together on our shared values."

Four main sections were the held throughout the day – the opening section followed by three topic-oriented panels. Brahmaviharidas Swami addressed the first panel titled 'Human Dignity – Divine Equality between Creations and the Depth of Human Commonalities'.

After reciting Vedic prayers for peace and harmony, Brahmaviharidas Swami remarked that this conference is more than path-breaking; it is path-making! It will guide the conscience of humanity. The Hindu faith has promoted equality and harmony amongst all forms of life, which is echoed by all enlightened religions and philosophies. In order to turn the word 'harmony' from a beautiful noun into an active verb, he remembered HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj's words from the UN Millenium Summit in which Swamshri had asked leaders to have three dialogues to generate more harmony – dialogue with leaders, dialogue with followers, and dialogue with oneself. Integrity in personal belief and action, the faith's beliefs and actions, and interfaith words and actions can "create here a little bit of the heaven we promise in the hereafter." He remembered how *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj often reminds us that to find the right answers, we must first ask the right questions. If we ask ourselves to whom creation belongs, we discover that creation is universal and therefore so is its Creator. Therefore, who are we to divide up a universal world.

Addressing the notion that human harmony is only a wishful dream, he stated, "Why is it wrong to dream? Going to the moon was once just a dream but it came true. Colonizing Mars is a dream but it will come true. So then why should we not dream for a more harmonious world when we know that it will bring a smile to the lips of God who did not create this world to perish in disharmony but to flourish in harmony."

H.E. Sheikh Dr Mohammed Bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa was encouraged by the words and shared, "Fabulous speech. How open-minded it was, and highly emotional with academic precision. A truly inspirational presentation."

Mr Bawa Jain, Secretary-General of The Council of World Religious Leaders and Founder-President of The Centre for Responsible Leadership, who had organized HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visit to the UN in 2000, noted, "A great, thought-provoking speech. Delivered with immense grace and dignity. Such a clear expression of our shared values and in a way that honoured the historic nature and venue of this forum. This is the first time swamis of Hinduism have been invited to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and this was the right first step on a long and unified journey ahead."

One of the moderators of the panels and the Secretary General of Religions for Peace International, Professor Azza Karam found the points of Brahmaviharidas Swami's speech to be a key summary of the panel sessions highlighting the importance of not just celebrating similarities but also of celebrating dissimilarities because we have such strong similarities. Also, reiterating the importance of looking within our own faith and its beliefs, Professor Karam on a personal note inquired about the upcoming mandir in Abu Dhabi and offered support for such projects of harmony and tolerance.

Brahmeshanandji and others declared this a

proud moment for Hinduism and many leaders of other faiths from across the world expressed their interest in working with BAPS to further religious harmony around the world, while many others commended the steps taken in the UAE and Bahrain to further the fraternity amongst faiths.

In concluding the forum, the religious leaders agreed upon a Declaration on Common Human Values which announced a collective objective of enhancing cooperation and trust between the global community's spiritual leaders by leveraging the common principles that undergird all faith traditions to more effectively promote the values of moderation and harmony, and advance tolerance and peace.

The forum also allowed for constructive personal dialogues between leaders. HE Sheikh Dr Mohammed Bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa and Brahmaviharidas Swami had a private meeting where there was a warm, friendly, transparent and truthful dialogue on how members of all faiths may work together for peaceful co-existence.

With special arrangement by the organizers, delegates were also taken to Al Diriyah – the original hometown of the first Saudi Kingdoms and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The event was graciously organized by the Muslim World League with directions from the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and was held at the Ritz Carlton in Riyadh, the country's capital. ◆

Special Prayer Assembly for His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan

15 May 2022, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Brahmaviharidas Swami visits HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan to express condolences and prayers

Devotional prayers offered by the devotees

In the morning, Brahmavihari Swami visited the royal court to express prayers and condolences on behalf of the Hindu community in the UAE to His Highness.

In the evening, hundreds gathered at the BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi, to offer special prayers for His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Brahmavihari Swami addressed the assembly with a moving tribute highlighting how His Highness inspired the whole nation and countless individuals, enhancing the nation's quality of life with love, peace and tolerance. He added that such leaders never pass away, they pass on their values and vision. From India, HH Mahant Swami Maharaj also offered special prayers. ◆

INDIA

DE-ADDICTION CAMPAIGN BY BAPS BALAKS

8–22 May 2022

To commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Shatabdi Mahotsav and India's Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, *balaks* of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha conducted a large-scale De-Addiction Campaign between 8 and 22 May 2022. During his lifetime, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired over 40 lakh people worldwide to give up addictions. Following in his footsteps, these children sacrificed their summer vacation to spread the message of de-addiction and promote a healthier society.

Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed these young campaigners with a spirit to 'March Forward' at the inauguration on 8 May 2022 in Surat. With such inspiration, the gallant young children went out to wage a war on the perilous addictions that plague and hinder society.

In total, 16,000 boys in groups of four (total: 4,200 groups) contacted people at their homes, shops, factories, bus stands and many public places during the 15-day campaign. They informed them about the health, financial, cultural and other benefits of freeing themselves from the shackles of gutka, cigarettes, tobacco, liquor and other inappropriate habits. Undeterred by hardships, summer heat, odd hours and other inconveniences, the boys enthusiastically reached out to and personally met over 1.4 million people throughout Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, New Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Karnataka. Of these, over 400,000 people pledged to shun their addictions and that they, too, would convince others to give up their addictions.

Among the benefits of conducting this campaign was that the boys gained confidence and developed communication and leadership skills. Furthermore, the campaign also consolidated their own resolve to never engage in any form of addictions.

ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN BY BAPS BALIKAS

8–22 May 2022

Pramukh Swami Maharaj actively advocated for the nurture of nature. During his lifetime, he inspired the planting and nurturing of more than 15 lakh trees worldwide, and encouraged numerous environmental preservation projects.

To commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Shatabdi Mahotsav and India's Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, young girls (*balikas*), aged between 8 and 14, of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, conducted a large-scale 'Environment Conservation Campaign' from 8 to 22 May 2022. These young girls dedicated their summer vacation, forgoing their leisure time, to spread guru

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's messages of saving water and energy, and to promote environmental conservation. In a world plagued by global warming, deforestation and rapid urbanization, this campaign raised awareness among the public of the perils of not caring for the environment and the earth's resources.

With the blessings of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj, 14,000 girls, divided into 3,300 groups, conducted this drive nationally. They reached out to people at their homes to give three important messages:

- Stop leakages to prevent wasteful water loss. Optimize water usage during activities like washing clothes and utensils, bathing, and others, and use RO purified drinking water effectively.
- Turn off electrical appliances when not in use. Use LEDs and adopt solar usage where possible.
- Plant and nurture at least one sapling.

These gallant young girls spread eco-awareness among all strata of society, personally meeting and inspiring 1.3 million people nationally. As a result, 1.2 million people pledged to save water and energy, and 7.5 lakh people pledged to plant and nurture a sapling.

By participating in this campaign, the resolve of the young girls themselves to conserve such resources was consolidated, and their self-confidence, and public speaking and communication skills were boosted.

EYE CAMP

15 May 2022, Kolkata

About 470 patients benefitted from the Eye Camp organized at BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata, with the support of Lions North Calcutta Hospital & Medical Centre associated with Badabazar, Shree Dahmi Mata Prachar Samity.

After assessment by expert doctors, around 360 patients received free spectacles and 54 patients were offered free cataract operations.

Special transport arrangements were made for the patients who went for surgery.

DE-ADDICTION RALLIES BY BAPS CHILDREN ON WORLD NO-TOBACCO DAY

31 May 2022

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj often warned, "Addictions cause destruction." Thus, as part of his centennial year celebrations, 50,000 BAPS children, participated in the De-Addiction Rallies organized at 100 BAPS centres in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka, West Bengal and others centres across India on World No-Tobacco Day on 31 May 2022.

These rallies included inspiring exhibits, creative floats, stirring rhymes and emotive jingles, encouraging people to quit harmful addictions. During these rallies, the children appealed to all to support social uplift through de-addiction and a healthy lifestyle.

MANAV UTKARSH MAHOTSAV

1–5 June 2022, Rajkot

As part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary celebrations, the BAPS Swaminarayan

Mandir in Rajkot organized a five-day 'Manav Utkarsh Mahotsav' to inspire people towards an addiction-free, values-based life, and to promote family and social harmony.

The event was held at the vast Racecourse Grounds, and featured exhibitions highlighting the above messages, and the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The highlight of each evening assembly was a series of inspiring and enlightening speeches by Apurvamuni Swami based on the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his succession of Gunatit gurus that gave insights and guidance on the event's main messages.

In addition, during the five-day event, blood and organ donation camps were organized in which over 475,000 cc of blood was collected and 1,200 pledged to donate organs.

Inspired by the event's messages, over 100 experienced doctors pledged to treat 20,000 patients and perform 2,500 operations free.

Over the five days, around 35,000 people attended the event.

LAUNCH OF PRAMUKH SANSKRITAM COURSE

2–9 June 2022, Sarangpur

Under the auspices of the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Shatabdi Mahotsav, an online study course, 'Pramukh Sanskritam,' has been launched for *balaks* and *balikas* who have memorized all 315 *shloks* of the Satsang Diksha as well as the 565 Swaminarayan Siddhant Karikas from the Swaminarayan Siddhant Sudha.

Understanding aids long-term retention of what has been memorized. As the understanding of such *shloks* requires a detailed knowledge of Sanskrit, as well as the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and the Sampradaya's beliefs and traditions, the course is designed to deliver in-depth knowledge of Satsang, Darshanam (Philosophy), Bhasha Kaushalam (Sanskrit speaking, reading and writing) and Kanthapath (Memorization techniques).

A total of 69 *balaks* and 47 *balikas*, aged between 8 and 14, enrolled for this online study course, which will involve one hour of daily study. Of these, 84 are from different states of India and 32 are from Australia.

The launch of this course was held in-person at BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur in the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami. Those unable to attend joined online. During this eight-day gathering, the children gained an overview of the Pramukh Sanskritam course through classes, breakout sessions, recitation, revision and various other activities.

The children were guided by *sadguru* and learned swamis, as well as by professors, lecturers and students of the Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya.

Every day, the children participated in *samuh* puja. In addition to four hours of daily study classes and discussions with swamis, the children recited *shloks* of the Satsang Diksha and Swaminarayan Siddhant Karikas before the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (in the main mandir), Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj (at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir and in the Rang

Mandapam) and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj (at Pramukh Smruti Mandir).

The children also received the blessings of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj via a live video link from Ahmedabad. Swamishri formally launched the Pramukh Sanskritam course by lighting the inaugural *divo*. *Balaks* presented what they had learnt and asked for blessings. Swamishri conversed with the *balaks* in Sanskrit and gave blessings.

A special session was also arranged for parents in which Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Adarshjivan swami provided guidance on how to support their children during this course.

GOVERNOR OF GUJARAT AT CONVENTION ON NATURAL FARMING

15 June 2022, Sarangpur

On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of India's Independence, the Birth Centenary of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and an invocation by Hon. Prime Minister Shri Narendrabhai Modi to expand awareness and practise of natural farming, the District Administration of Botad district, in association with BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, organized a convention on 'natural farming' for farmers of the Botad district.

Governor of Gujarat HE Acharya Devvratji, graced the event, attended by more than 1,700 farmers.

On arrival, the governor visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, Yagnapurush Wadi and Yagnapurush Gaushala, and was delighted with the functioning of these institutes. Then, he had darshan in the main mandir and visited stalls set up by local farmers displaying their products produced through natural farming.

In the convention, following the ceremonial lighting of the lamp by all the stage guests, Jnaneshwardas Swami addressed the assembly and also read out the blessings of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj especially sent for this occasion.

Thereafter, the governor delivered an interactive, engaging, and inspiring keynote address, highlighting the benefits of using natural farming techniques and the ill effects of using chemicals such as pesticides and fertilizers. At the end, he urged the farmers to gradually switch over to natural farming techniques. His address and appeal were well-received by the farmers.

BLOOD DONATION CAMP

19 June 2022, Kolkata

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata, with the support of Terapanth Yuvak Parishad Behala and Saroj Gupta Cancer & Research Institute successfully conducted a Blood Donation Camp at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir.

Around 200 donors donated blood and were cared for by a team of 22 dedicated medical professionals and 30 volunteers.

Dr Arnab Gupta, Director of Saroj Gupta Cancer Centre & Research Institute, and his team was also present and provided support and gave guidance on cancer awareness.

UK & EUROPE

SPONSORED WALK FROM PARIS TO LONDON

28 April to 2 May 2022, Paris, France

Jayesh Patel, a devotee from London, completed a 260 km sponsored walk from Paris to London in five days to raise funds and awareness for the upcoming BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir & Cultural Complex in Paris, France.

The Paris-to-London walk also commemorated the centenary celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who had tirelessly done *vicharan* around the world to selflessly serve society.

Jayesh began the walk on the morning of 28 April from the Eiffel Tower in central Paris and walked up to 60 kilometres each day, until he concluded the marathon journey at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, on the evening of 2 May.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CONFERENCE

28 May 2022, London

A one-day conference for international students, titled "Focus: Chances, Choices, Challenges", was held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London.

Over a thousand delegates from all over the UK attended the event. It aimed to provide support, guidance and encouragement to those who have come to the UK for their higher education.

The conference introduced the delegates to career planning, personal growth and life in the UK from specialists. It also provided spiritual guidance from learned swamis, including Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami, visiting from India.

Throughout the day, the delegates enjoyed a variety of interesting and thought-provoking presentations from the guest speakers, as well as panel discussions, video montages and interactive games.

His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj had also sent special written and video blessings from India for the delegates. The day concluded with a networking dinner.

BAPS TRUSTEE RECEIVES QUEEN'S HONOUR

2 June 2022, London

Vinu Bhattessa, a longstanding trustee of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in the UK, has been awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Her Majesty The Queen in the Birthday Honours List for 2022.

The citation reads: Kishorkant Bhattessa (Vinu Bhattessa). For charitable and voluntary services, particularly during COVID-19.

The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire is a British order of chivalry, rewarding contributions to the arts and sciences, work with charitable and welfare organisations, and public service outside the civil service. It was established on 4 June 1917 by King George V.

Vinubhai has been serving BAPS for over 30 years and was a key figure during the construction of the *shikharbaddha* mandir in London.

BAPS MANDIRS LIGHT BEACONS TO CELEBRATE QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE

2 June 2022, UK

BAPS mandirs around the UK joined thousands of others in lighting special beacons to

mark the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

More than 3,000 beacons were lit by charities, communities and faith groups all over the UK. The lighting of each beacon at BAPS mandirs was part of a community celebration including prayers and a cultural programme paying tribute to Her Majesty's seven decades of public service.

Fittingly, the lighting ceremony at London Mandir coincided with the start of a series of *yagnas* marking the centenary celebrations of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The Beacon was placed in front of a 27-foot *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the courtyard of Neasden Temple, where a *maha-arti* concluded the evening's festivities.

MAHAYAGNAS TO COMMEMORATE PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S CENTENARY

2 June to 3 July 2022, UK

A series of Vishwa Shanti Mahayagnas were held as a part of the community and family programmes in the UK commemorating the centenary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Use of special smoke-free, eco-friendly flames enabled these traditional Vedic ceremonies conducted indoors over five weekends.

The *yagnas* were conducted by expert pandits, supported by children and youths who provided skilled guidance on the rituals and explained their deeper spiritual significance.

The *yagnas* provided families an opportunity to worship and learn together, including young children who were given a specially designed activity booklet of puzzles, games and bite-sized information on the importance and significance of *yagnas*.

The *mahayagnas* at London Mandir were held from 2–5 and 11–12 June. *Mahayagnas* were also conducted at the BAPS mandirs in Birmingham (18–19 June), Leicester (25–26 June) and Manchester (2–3 July).

During these *yagnas*, thousands of participants collectively prayed for peace, protection and global harmony, greater family unity – all values that Pramukh Swami Maharaj embodied and fostered throughout his life.

SOUTH AMERICA

SATSANG VICHARAN IN SÃO PAULO AND BRASILIA

12–17 April 2022, Brazil

BAPS swamis undertook a Satsang *vicharan* tour in Brazil.

On 13 April, the Indian Embassy in Brasilia hosted an event to celebrate India's 75 years of independence in the presence of Ambassador of India Shri Suresh Reddy, local Indian citizens, embassy staff members, and other local officials. First, Uttamshlok Swami recited the Vedic Shanti

Path followed by a speech on tolerance and harmony by Priyaseva Swami.

A family *shibir* was organized on 16 April at the Shiv Mandir between Campinas and Sao Paulo. The *shibir* theme focused on maintaining spirituality together as a family and community. It featured talks, group activities and question-answer sessions led by the swamis.

Ram Navami and Swaminarayan Jayanti celebrations took place on 17 April with about 150 participants from São Paulo, Campinas, and surrounding areas. Priyasevadas Swami's speech highlighted the understanding, humility, and sacrifice of Bhagwan Shri Ram, and also relayed the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, emphasizing the importance of a living guru and mandirs in practising and continuing Hindu teachings.

The swamis visited the homes and offices of devotees in the São Paulo area, and also visited Campinas and conducted a family *shibir* there. This satsang *vicharan* helped rejuvenate and strengthen faith among devotees residing in Brazil.

ASIA PACIFIC

SATSANG SHIBIRS

19 March 2022 to 27 May 2022, Australia & New Zealand

A total of 812 (464 male and 348 female) *karyakars* attended the 'Ek Nishan – Pramukh Shatabdi Mahotsav' *shibirs* organized at Sydney (19 March), Melbourne (18 April), Perth (30 April), Brisbane (7 May), Adelaide (14 May) and Auckland (27 May).

These one-day *shibirs* guided the *karyakars* on how to carry out the 100-day Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan to spread the glory and messages of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj during this Shatabdi year.

The *karyakars* were guided through speeches, inspirational videos, interactive activities, workshops, and the video blessings of *sadguru* swamis and *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Karyakars at some remote centres who could not attend in person, participated via the live webcast.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ CENTENARY CYCLE CHALLENGE

1–31 May 2022, Australia & New Zealand

In childhood, *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to ride a Hercules bicycle to commute from Chansad to Padra. Thus, in memory of this and to inspire all towards a healthy lifestyle, as part of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary celebrations, the 'PSM100 Cycle Challenge – Ride for Rajipo', was organized at 24 BAPS centres in Australia and New Zealand.

Despite the rain, wind, and very cold weather in some centres, a total of more than 900 children, teenagers, youths and adults participated and cycled over 10,000 km along the routes set at their centres.

UAE

BAPS MANDIR FEATURED AT EXPO 2020

1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022, Dubai

Delayed by one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Expo 2020 Dubai was the first ever held

in the Middle East. Each of the 192 participating countries showcased their own unique architecture, culture and inspiring innovations in their specially constructed country pavilions. Over 24 million visitors from all over the world visited Expo 2020 during the six months from October 2021 to March 2022.

India's four-floor pavilion showcased Ayurveda, culture, architecture, yoga, its space programme, and its fast-growing economy.

The Indian Consulate in Dubai invited BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi, to partner and display the rich culture and diversity of India at the award-winning India Pavilion, which received more than 1.5 million visitors. In the pavilion, BAPS Hindu Mandir exhibited a creative real and virtual presentation that comprised of a majestic 3D model of the upcoming BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. The BAPS exhibit also depicted Hindu culture, traditions, values and spirituality.

Around 30 BAPS volunteers served at the Expo 2020 India Pavilion during the six months, delivering inspirational presentations about the upcoming mandir, BAPS and other aspects of Hindu culture, traditions and spirituality to the visitors. Inspired by the BAPS exhibit, many visitors also went to the construction site in Abu Dhabi to see the work in progress.

BAPS had the honour of welcoming many dignitaries to the BAPS Hindu Mandir exhibit at the Expo 2020 India Pavilion. These included:

- HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, UAE
- Shri Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce & Industry, India
- Shri S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs of India
- HE Shri Om Birla, Hon. Speaker of Lok Sabha, India
- HH Sheikh Hamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Managing Director of ADIA, UAE
- Shri Bhupendra Patel, Chief Minister of Gujarat, India
- Shri V. Muraleedharan, Minister of State for External Affairs of India
- Shri N.V. Ramana, Honourable Chief Justice of India
- HE Pavan Kapoor, Ambassador of India to the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi
- HE Dr Aman Puri, Consul General of India, Dubai
- HE Loknath Sharma, Minister of Economic Affairs, Bhutan
- HE Dr Ahmed Abdul Rahman AlBanna, UAE Ambassador to India
- Mr Vinod Adani, Director, Adani Group, India
- Ms Neha Kakkar, Prominent Singer, India
- Mr Gerard Wolf and French delegation
- King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden
- HE Liselott Andersson, Ambassador of Sweden to the United Arab Emirates
- Shri Anurag Thakur, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, India
- Mr Anil Agarwal, Chairman of Vedanta Group, India
- William Russell, Lord Mayor of London, UK
- Dr Bu Abdullah, Chairman Bu Abdullah Group
- HH Princess Sora Bint Saud Al Saud, Saudi Arabia
- HE Laila Rahhal El Aftani, President of Business Gate
- Mr Lakshmi Mittal, Executive Chairman, ArcelorMittal, UK

MAHAPEETH PUJAN

27 May 2022, BAPS Mandir, Abu Dhabi

The Mahapeeth Pujan Vidhi marked the laying the first carved stones of the first floor of the mandir. Thus far, 14 layers of stones comprising the foundation and the ground floor have been completed. The construction of the first floor of the mandir is an important feature as it will shape the *mandovar* and *garbhagruha* (inner sanctum).

Akshaymunidas Swami and Brahmaviharidas Swami performed the Vedic ceremony, along with the Ambassador of India to the UAE His Excellency Sunjay Sudhir, community leaders, members of the congregation and over 500 distinguished guests from across the UAE.

The *mahapeeth* stones were carved by artisans in Rajasthan and consecrated by HH Mahant Swami Maharaj in India before being transported to Abu Dhabi. In this Vedic ceremony, swamis recited Sanskrit verses as prayers for the successful and timely completion of the mandir, which will be open to people of all faiths.

Ambassador of India to the UAE, His Excellency Sunjay Sudhir said, "This temple is a symbol of love, harmony and speaks to the generosity of UAE's rulers. The stories etched in stone by the artisans and architects will inspire everyone who visits the mandir. The mandir is an exemplary example of the commitment of the leaders of UAE and India towards building an environment of peace and tolerance and ensuring that all residents of this country feel at home."

A medical camp, in collaboration with Aster Hospital was also held on site, providing free medical check-up and treatment to hundreds of workers and visitors.

AFRICA

ANNUAL KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

11 March 2022 to 8 May 2022

A total of 976 male and 535 female *karyakars*

from 17 African countries, including Malawi, Zambia, Congo, South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, participated in the Annual Karyakar Shibirs that took place between March and May 2022 in the inspiring presence of Pujya Viveksagar Swami.

Based on the theme 'Avsar' (Occasion or Opportunity), the *shibirs* were held in Lilongwe, Malawi (11–13 March) Lusaka, Zambia (18–20 March), Lenasia, South Africa (25–27 March), Nairobi, Kenya (15–17 April), Mwanza, Tanzania (22–24 April), and Kampala, Uganda (6–8 May).

Each two-and-a-half day *shibir* inspired the *karyakars* to celebrate the forthcoming Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations with unprecedented grandeur and comprised three sessions that highlighted the Centenary Celebrations as an *avsar* (opportunity): i) for remembering our guru's benevolence ii) to repay our guru's benevolence iii) to spread the glory of our guru throughout the world.

During the first session, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's innumerable altruistic contributions were recollected and presented through various mediums.

In the second session, the uniqueness of the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Shatabdi Mahotsav was explained, and that doing *seva* will give one a feeling

of fulfilment and satisfaction of serving our gurus.

In the third session, the benefits of our association with Satsang and the Satpurush were presented in a workshop that featured videos and discussions.

Also, the *shibirs* featured theme-related activities that encouraged everyone to join in this Shatabdi *seva* and serve to their very best capacity.

In each *shibir,* Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj bestowed his divine blessings on the *karyakars*.

NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

29 April 2022 to 1 May 2022, Lira, Uganda

In 1970, Yogiji Maharaj visited Lira with Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami Maharaj. Lira is situated 337 km, north of Uganda's capital city, Kampala.

The three-day Murti-Pratistha Mahotsav was celebrated in the presence of Pujya Viveksagar Swami.

On 29 April, the celebrations commenced with a kirtan *aradhana*. On 30 April, a grand *nagar yatra* took place through the streets of Lira in honour of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the mandir. In the evening appreciation assembly, all who had contributed towards the mandir project were felicitated.

On 1 May, Pujya Viveksagar Swami performed the Vedic installation rituals and inaugurated the mandir. In 2019, Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of these *murtis*.

The High Commissioner of India to Uganda, His Excellency Shri Ajay Kumar came especially from Kampala to grace this occasion.

NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

13–15 May 2022, Thika, Kenya

Regular satsang began in Thika, a suburb of Nairobi, from September 2000 and has been nurtured by the regular visits of swamis from Nairobi Mandir.

The three-day Mandir Murti-Pratishtha celebrations commenced on 13 May with a kirtan *aradhana* by swamis and youths. The Indian Ambassador to Kenya, Shri Virander Kumar Paul, also graced this occasion and commended the Sanstha's contributions in keeping India's ancient cultural values intact outside India through the building of mandirs.

On the morning of 14 May, 200 *yajmans* participated in the Shri Swaminarayan Yagna and Vastu Mahapuja. In the afternoon, many devotees from various BAPS centres of East Africa joined the local devotees in a grand *nagar yatra* of the *murtis* through the streets, so that the *murtis* could cast their divine glance and blessings on the town. In the evening, all who had supported the mandir were appreciated and felicitated.

On the morning of 15 May, Pujya Viveksagar Swami performed the Vedic installation of the *murtis* and ritually inaugurated the Thika Mandir. Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Nairobi on 4 October 2019.

Thereafter, in the inauguration assembly, Pujya Viveksagar Swami discoursed on the necessity and benefits of mandirs in society and the all-round wellbeing of individuals they facilitate. ◆

PARIVARIK SHANTI ABHIYAN FELICITATION ASSEMBLIES

Shatabdi sevaks parade before Mahant Swami Maharaj during the Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan felicitation assembly in Surat.

(*Inset*): Swamishri blesses all the volunteers (24 April 2022).

Such felicitation assemblies were held in over 45 locations, appreciating the dedicated efforts of 72,000 *shatabdi sevaks*.

HISTORIC INTERFAITH CONFERENCE
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 11 May 2022

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha was invited to participate in the Forum on Common Values Among Religious Followers organized by the World Muslim League, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Inset: Brahmavihari Swami delivers a speech at the forum on behalf of BAPS.

INAUGURATION OF BHAGATJI MAHARAJ SMRUTI MANDIR, MAHUVA, 27 May 2022

The newly constructed Bhagatji Maharaj Smruti mandir, built over the sacred cremation spot of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj on the banks of the River Malan, was ritually inaugurated. *Inset:* The *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami and Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj in the main shrine.

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ VISITS AMBLI VALI POL, AHMEDABAD, 24 June 2022

Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj visited the newly renovated Ambli Vali Pol for darshan.

1. Swamishri at the entrance of the Yagnapurush Pol Mandir.
2. Swamishri drapes a *chadar* over Pramukh Swami Maharaj and offers prayers for all.

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